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Aims and Activities:

The Society was formed in 1947 to provide a forum for the exchange of information on seabirds, and land birds at sea, by members for whom birdwatching is a spare time recreation and hobby. It also aims to coordinate the efforts of individual members using standardised recording methods so that observations can be of value to the professional ornithologist. In addition to the promotion of observations afloat, the RNBWS organises fieldwork and expeditions, often in cooperation with the Army and RAF Ornithological Societies.

The Royal Naval Birdwatching Society is the only organisation in the world which collects, collates and publishes data on seabirds and landbirds at sea. Membership is open to all those, regardless of nationality, who share a common interest in birds at sea. Instructions for joining can be found on the Society website www.rnbws.org.uk or by application to the Secretary.

Subscription Rates: Members: £12 per year, due 1 January. Subscriptions may be Gift Aided. Library rates: Cost of *Sea Swallow*, (£12) plus postage.

RNBWS Record Forms: These can be found on the website. Completed forms should be sent to the Secretary, or to the Editor of *Sea Swallow* (addresses at left).

Material for publication in *Sea Swallow* should be sent to the editor. Ideally submissions should be in MS Word or rtf format, but other formats are acceptable. Graphics should be jpeg or tiff. Accompanying photographs are welcome. Contributions are welcome at any time, but if for inclusion in the next edition should reach the editor by 30 July.

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Chairman's Foreword

by Rear Admiral Martin Alabaster

I started last year's foreword by welcoming the new-look, larger and more colourful *Sea Swallow*. I wrote the piece in anticipation of a good result but I must say I was bowled over by the quality of the published journal. You won't be surprised, therefore, that feedback was entirely favourable, and led to a record number of offerings for this year's edition - so many in fact that some articles have had to be held over to next year. I will simply underline this success by recording the thanks of the whole Society to David Dobson for his achievement as Editor.

There are many other indicators of good progress in the past year, but to my mind one of the most significant and gratifying is the return to these pages of WRP Bourne, who has been an inspiration to so many RNBWS members, and indeed to seabird watchers the world over, for many decades.

Unglamorous but perhaps the most important work recorded in these pages is the update of the RNBWS Checklist of Seabirds, produced by Neil Cheshire and Bill Bourne. Elsewhere, you can read about deck landing practices by Snowy Sheathbills during the Falklands war, and see the damage to breeding seabirds from fires in Madeira. You can read about ocean cruises, new Storm-petrels in the Pacific, and tagging and tracking of the critically endangered Balearic Shearwater. And on the fringes of the scope of *Sea Swallow* there is even an article about forest birding in Ghana.

The year has shown other marks of progress for the Society, with several new members and a new website. *Sea Swallow* is now available to members electronically, and will in future be available to non-members on the website two years after first publication. We also plan to put all back copies of *Sea Swallow* onto the website during the next year or so. Another sign of progress: the growing popularity of Mark Cutts' informative three-monthly e-mail newsletters.

It is some years since we decided to use some of the money left to the society by the late Captain David Simpson for a scholarship in his name, and this year we are giving away some £700 for three different causes (one of which is to continue our support for the South Georgia de-ratting project, which is reported upon in these pages). Next year we shall be supporting a survey into the White-billed Diver, small populations of which have been reported off the Moray coast in recent years. This is a bird that hardly ever leaves the vicinity of the arctic sea ice, so its appearance off the Scottish coast merits closer attention, and RNBWS support for this maritime venture is very much in keeping with the vision of the founders of our society. I encourage readers to find out more about this project and the scholarship scheme on the website.

In conclusion, I wish everyone a good birding year and encourage all to engage with the Society by sharing ideas, by coming to the AGM and by contributing to *Sea Swallow* and the Newsletter.

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Webmaster's Report

by CPO Mark Cutts

The last year has seen a great change for the society and its place on the internet. For many years our website was seldom visited, save for the online records database which has always been popular and well used. With this in mind I requested the funds to approach a new web designer, in order to update some of the online features, and generally bring the website into the twenty-first century. This process is now nearly complete, and I believe we now have a simple, modern and I hope user-friendly site that utilises some of the best features that social media and image-hosting services provide today.

The overall design is similar to many other conservation and nature sites. As well as posting news direct to the site, we have utilised the social media and micro-blogging service, 'Twitter'. This allows short news items to be posted via computer, Iphone or android and appear on all of the site's pages. Crucially the message will also contain the hyperlink or shortcut to the original article or news item. This I hope will prove to be a simple but effective way of spreading seabird and conservation related information.

At the same time, an image hosting account was created using Flckr, so that we can hold all of the society's best seabird and landbird at sea images in a single place. Our hope is to create a database of members' photographs, covering all of the world's seabirds. As the images are posted they automatically appear on our site, with a link to the original.

The database remains the same however, and we have made it a lot easier to update records. We also have a new online submission form and it is hoped that people will add records as they are spotted in the field.

As the webmaster, it is my intention to continue improving the website as new utilities or ideas emerge. As always, I am open to ideas and I welcome your comments.

Among my other duties I also create and distribute the quarterly newsletter. Published in January, April, July and October, this is only as good as the articles that are contributed and I invite all members and readers to pass me their news of seabirds and land birds at sea, together with information and images that they feel members of the society would enjoy. The newsletter is distributed in either Word or PDF format by e-mail. If readers would like to receive it then please pass me a current e-mail address.

With a regular newsletter to produce and many seabird records to put on the database I can always do with a bit of assistance. If you feel you have the time to help then please get in contact.

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flickr "***RNBWSbirder***" (for access, contact the webmaster)

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Plate 1. The only surviving chick in 2010, Ringed: PM0278. © *Frank Zino*

The effect of the fires of 13th August 2010 on the breeding population of Zino's Petrel (*Pterodroma madeira*)

by Francis Zino, Freira Conservation Project &
Manuel J. Biscoito, Curator of the Funchal Natural History Museum

Background

What is now known as Zino's Petrel, *Pterodroma madeira,* was first handled by Padre Ernesto Schmitz in 1903, who wrongly identified it as *Oestrolata feae,(Schmitz 1905),* which is now known at *Pterodroma deserta.* Only in 1934 did Mathews suggest a separation, as a subspecies of *Pterodroma mollis*. (Mathews 1934 a&b). Over subsequent years the bird was thought to have become extinct, although two juveniles were found, one in October 1940, the other in October 1951, having been attracted by lights. They are now in the Funchal Museum.

After some clever detective work, Paul Alexander Zino (Alec) discovered the breeding locality of these birds in the Serras de St Antonio in the Central Massif of Madeira, in 1969 (Zino & Zino, 1986). There was no responsible authority at the time and for fear of specimen collectors; work carried out was very low key until in the mid 1980s it was noted that there was no successful breeding because all eggs and chicks were being eaten by rats. We did not know at the time that cats too could reach some of the ledges and were part of the problem (Zino, 1992).

In 1986 the Freira Conservation Project (FCP) was set up with the help of Dr. Alan Buckle (then at ICI Public Health), who supplied rat poison and funding for the project. Over a period of time new nests were found and with the help of rat and cat control measures the birds began to breed successfully; the numbers of young fledglings increased and we began to get returns of ringed juveniles.

The project had always considered it essential to have the breeding grounds under government control, rather than privately owned, and in the early 1990s an attempt was made to purchase the land from the landowners. However this was turned down, because they wished to continue grazing their sheep and goats over the ground.

In 1999 the project applied to the Arcadia Fund, managed by Fauna and Flora International, for funding to purchase the breeding grounds. This was successful and developed into a LIFE project application, based on the fact that the Arcadia Fund was backing the project. The project reached such dimensions that it was too big for FCP to handle and was handed to the Parque Natural da Madeira (PNM), which had been formed in1982, and which does excellent work.

With the guarantee of money from the LIFE project and the Arcadia Fund the Madeira government decided to expropriate the land where the breeding grounds were situated, and while this was done with immediate effect by Government decree, there are still many owners who have not been paid. This has led to discontent and may be a significant factor, for the fires of 2010 were almost certainly arson.

The fires of 13 August 2010

On 13 August 2010 multiple fires started in the island's central massif, which is where Zino's Petrel breeds. Certainly arson was involved, but the arsonist probably did not intend to cause the damage produced by 100kph winds - 10% of the island was burned.

Plate 2. Satellite photograph of Madeira showing smoke reaching 200K to South. © *NASA. Image courtesy Jeff Schmaltz, MODIS Rapid Response Team at NASA GSFC*

The devastation caused was horrendous and the breeding area of Zino's petrel was sealed off as it was unsafe due to landslides in the burnt and unstable ground. As for the birds, there were 25 dead chicks and 13 live chicks. There were also 3 dead adults of which two were breeders and one a pre-breeder. These dead adults were handed over to the Museum, but sadly the juveniles were thrown away, thereby missing a great opportunity for further investigation. These numbers do not take into account that these birds are very attracted by light and some may well have been attracted by the fire and been burnt. Lighting fires on mountain tops on very dark nights is a method used by the locals on Cape Verde to catch Fea's Petrel for eating!

Plate 3. Main Ledge before the fire. © *Frank Zino*

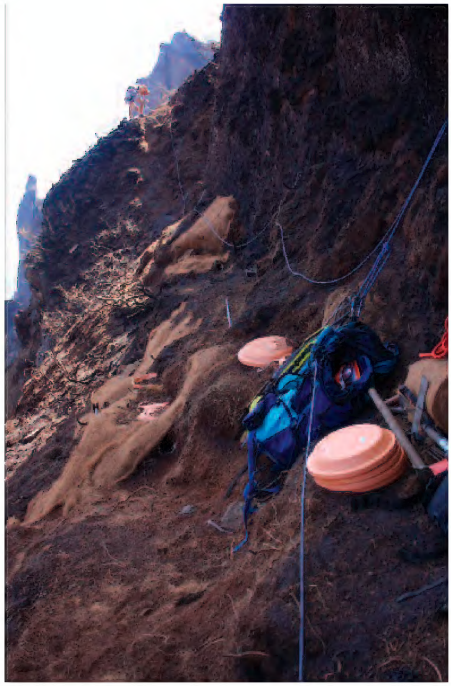

Plate 4. Main Ledge after the fire. © *Frank Zino* **Plate 5.** Landslides making the area very dangerous to be in. The degree of devastation caused by the fire is also visible. © *Frank Zino*

Plate 6. Approach to tie up point above Main Ledge. © *Frank Zino*

Plate 7. Removing burnt junk from Main Ledge. © *Frank Zino*

A visit to the main ledge on the 16th September showed us the extent of the devastation. The approach to the point where we roped up to descend to the ledge was unstable and difficult to walk on. The main ledge had peaty soil and this had burnt, leaving almost bare volcanic rock. The PNM team did a fantastic job putting in artificial nests as can be seen in the photograph comparing the state of the ledge before and after the fire.

There was a lot of rubbish on the ledge, including all the project monitoring equipment, and this was collected and sent back up to the top. This was an arduous job involving a lot of muscle, but the ledge looked as good as possible. We had been on the ledge for some time when we noticed a bird tangled and hanging from a stump of a tree by its leg. It had been ringed the previous year as a breeding bird, was in a very poor state and eventually died

This brought the total of known adults to have died in the fire to 4. Whilst monitoring by the project team immediately after the fire showed 25 dead chicks and 13 live chicks, all but one of these chicks died, for reasons that remain unkown, but very probably it was starvation. The remains of a further chick eaten by cats were also found. Thus the total known death toll was 4 adults and 38 juveniles. What a truly bumper year this would have been!!

On the 14th October 2010, with the help of the climbers from the staff of the PNM we visited the nest of the one remaining chick. It was ringed (PM0278) and weighed 259gr.

It should be said that until a few days before there had been a second juvenile on the ledge, but it was not on the nest for this visit, and we think it may well have fledged.

The years following the fire

The years following the fires have been carefully monitored. The recovery of the flora on the ledges is essential, but has been very slow. The ledges which were easier to work on, because they were not so steep and the ground was peaty, were badly burnt. The ledges less affected by the fire were those that were very steep and so the fire swept upwards very fast causing less damage.

In 2011 we monitored the return of the birds early in the season by listening to their calls at night. Certainly the number of calls compared well with previous years and so we were very hopeful. Two visits to the main ledge, which had originally had up to 18 nests, were very discouraging. Two birds which we had known as successful breeders for several years were found dead in their nesting burrow. No apparent cause of death could be found. On another visit, another known successful breeder was found dead at the entrance to its burrow, again for no obvious reason. Could there be toxic fumes in the burrows as a result of the fires? This is doubtful, given the prevalence of wind in the area, but it is difficult to think of any other explanation.

The end of the season produced 16 juveniles, which was rather better than we had expected and encouraging for the future. Ten years earlier we would have been delighted!

In 2012 we again monitored the returning birds, but the Petrels seemed unwilling to use the artificial nests the PNM had so laboriously put on the ledges. The main ledge, once the mainstay of the colony, ended the season without a single nest occupied. The flora showed some recovery, but this was very slow and the first plant to return in force was bracken. When it came to ringing juveniles in October, we only managed 7 birds which was hugely disappointing and worrying. There were another two nests on a very dangerous ledge, Manga dos Espanhois, which was only visited later when the occupants may well have fledged. Even counting these in, a total count of 9 juveniles fledged was very disappointing and a cause for concern.

The 2013 season started with deep misgivings. The birds were late in arriving, probably due to unusual weather conditions, for other birds were similarly affected, notably the late arrival of Cory's at their nests on Selvagem Grande. However, by mid May the number of calls seemed about normal, and this raised our hopes. However, so far there has been no nesting activity on the main ledge nor the small ledge and this is cause for great concern.

The recovery of the flora has been very slow, but it is a huge habitat and maybe the birds have moved elsewhere to breed. We must return to the basic principles of 1969 and start listening at night in neighbouring areas.

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the Parque Natural da Madeira for all their help and they should be congratulated for the many hours of hard work trying to rebuild the nesting areas. The Direcção de Florestas also put in a huge effort as did the Army who helped with clearing, and the Air Force, who carried out seed drops to encourage plant regeneration.

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Plate 8. Balearic Shearwater at the nest in Sa Cella, Mallorca. © *Miguel McMinn*

Tagging and tracking the critically endangered Balearic Shearwater: summer 2013 update

by Dr Russell Wynn

Since 2010, small teams of British and Mallorcan researchers have been deploying tracking devices on the Critically Endangered Balearic Shearwater, with the aim of identifying migration routes and preferred feeding areas in order to inform targeted conservation action. Background information, together with a full account of the 2011 expedition and links to the 2010 expedition, can be found on the *Birdguides* webzine:
http://www.birdguides.com/webzine/article.asp?a=2853
http://www.birdguides.com/webzine/article.asp?a=2855

In spring 2012 and 2013 we undertook further expeditions to the Balearic Islands to continue and expand this research. As with previous years, the focus was on the large Balearic Shearwater cave colony at Sa Cella, Mallorca, but work also continued at La Mola, Menorca, home to a colony of Yelkouan-type 'Menorcan' Shearwaters. Here, we provide a progress update on our efforts to find out more about these highly threatened seabirds.

Geolocator tracking

We now have three years of geolocator (GLS) data, providing a comprehensive overview of the at-sea distribution and behaviour of breeding birds from Sa Cella. Most breeding adults migrate out of the Mediterranean and spend the post-breeding period (July–Sept) off west Iberia, with a few birds penetrating north to the coasts of

northern Biscay. The first year of GLS data were published in the open-access journal PLoS One (link below), and subsequent years of data will be analysed to assess inter-annual variability in migration routes and foraging areas. It will be fascinating to see if individual breeding birds follow the same routes and visit the same foraging areas every year, and whether males and females stay together or visit different areas. The data are also being used by colleagues in Spain, Portugal and France to identify important feeding areas, for the species that could be targets for spatial protection measures, e.g. Important Bird Areas (IBAs).

http://www.plosone.org/article/info%3Adoi%2F10.1371%2Fjournal.pone.0033753

Plate 9. The team downloads data from a geolocator recovered from a Balearic Shearwater at Sa Cella. © *Russell Wynn*

In addition, thanks to funding from Natural England and RSPB, 40 GLS devices were deployed on fledgling Balearic Shearwaters at Sa Cella in June 2013. The aim of this work is to try and identify where young Balearic Shearwaters go in their first three years, prior to first breeding. It is possible that the large numbers of Balearic Shearwaters visiting northwest France and southwest UK in recent years are predominantly immature non-breeding birds, as our tracking data suggest that very few, if any, of our tagged breeding adults visit these areas. The tiny GLS devices should stay on the young birds and continue logging data over the next two or three years, and we hope to recapture a proportion of these birds when they return to the cave in the future (metal ringing data indicates that many Sa Cella fledglings have subsequently returned to breed there). At the time of writing, we have already received two exciting reports of birds carrying geolocators off the Isles of Scilly (on 28 July and 3 Aug), including one that was photographed and identified as a juvenile from Sa Cella.

Plate 10. PhD student, Rhiannon, holding a fledgling Balearic Shearwater at Sa Cella; a newly deployed geolocator is just visible on the right leg of the bird. © *Alice Jones* **Plate 11.** Balearic Shearwater photographed off the Isles of Scilly on 28 July 2013; a small black PIT tag is just visible above the metal ring on the left leg, indicating it is one of the juveniles tagged at Sa Cella in June 2013. This is the first direct evidence that juvenile Balearic Shearwaters are visiting UK waters. © *Joe Pender*

GPS tracking

We now have three years of high-resolution GPS data, derived from tags attached to the backs of Balearic Shearwaters during their foraging trips (of several days duration) in the incubation phase. This is helping us to track where the birds go to feed during this crucial part of the breeding season, why they use the areas that they do, and how they navigate to and from these foraging sites. Detailed information on daily activity patterns (roosting, flying, foraging) is also being obtained. Some of these data have recently been shared with colleagues at Barcelona University, who are compiling GPS data from several Mediterranean seabird species to identify where interactions with commercial fisheries occur. This is enabling them to target potential mitigation measures for seabird bycatch, which is one of the major threats to the Balearic Shearwater.

Plate 12. The team busy deploying a GPS device on a Balearic Shearwater at Sa Cella. © *Russell Wynn*

Time-Depth Recorders

Several Time-Depth Recorders have also been deployed at Sa Cella, together with GLS and GPS tags. These tiny devices provide information on the depth to which the birds are diving during foraging - initial results indicate that some Balearic Shearwaters are capable of diving to depths in excess of 20 metres! These combined deployments mean that diving behaviour can be related to geographic location and, potentially, commercial fishing activity, which may provide insights into foraging behaviour around fishing vessels.

Stable isotope analysis

We are also undertaking stable isotope analysis of Balearic Shearwater blood and feathers, in collaboration with Dr Steve Votier (University of Plymouth) and Dr Clive Trueman (University of Southampton). Stable isotope data provide information on the shearwaters' diets, which, when combined with geographic data derived from tracking devices, allows us to study the potential feeding of birds on fisheries discards, and their vulnerability to bycatch in fishing gear in different areas.

Infrared cameras

We deployed Reconyx infrared trail cameras in Sa Cella in 2012 and 2013 in order to assess the birds' behaviour at the nest. This has provided us with probably the first ever images of Balearic Shearwaters mating at the nest, together with a range of other fascinating behaviours in this totally dark environment. By mounting cameras adjacent to nests of birds with and without tracking devices, we can also assess whether the devices are having an impact on the birds (both immediately after handling and while the birds are incubating the egg).

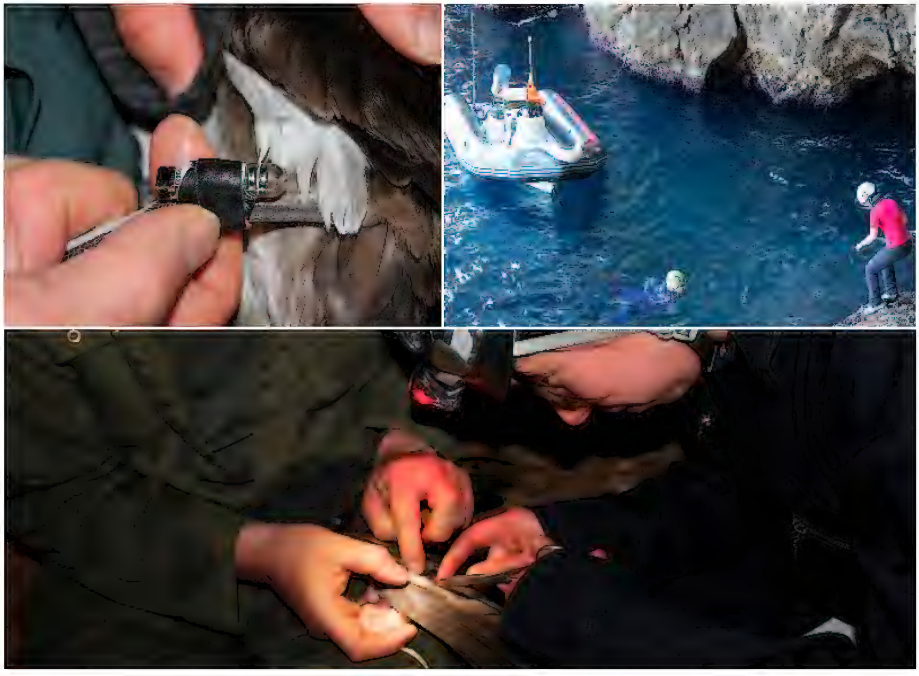

Plate 13. A Time-Depth Recorder attached to the leg of a Balearic Shearwater. © *Russell Wynn* **Plate 14.** Shearwaters are not the only accomplished divers at Sa Cella! Here, Miguel retrieves the RIB (our only way of exiting the cave) after one of its tethers came loose. He didn't even have time to take his helmet off! © *Russell Wynn* **Plate 15.** Rhiannon and Tim sample feathers from a Balearic Shearwater in Sa Cella for stable isotope analysis. © *Russell Wynn*

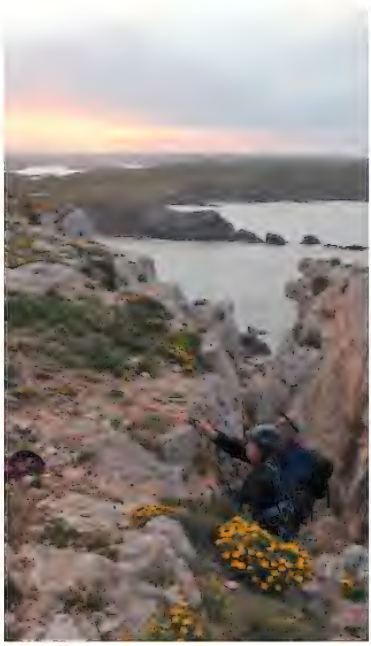

Plate 16. Rhiannon and Miguel abseiling down to the colony at La Mola. © *Russell Wynn* **Plate 17.** Balearic Shearwaters in the cave at Sa Cella at night; image taken with a Reconyx infra-red camera. © *Miguel McMinn*

Menorcan Shearwaters

We have continued to work on Yelkouan-type shearwaters at La Mola on Menorca. A total of 20 GLS have been deployed on these 'Menorcan' Shearwaters since 2010, but work at this colony is hindered by the presence of numerous predators (rats, cats and Peregrine Falcons), meaning that nesting shearwaters are mostly in inaccessible deep burrows. However, following a lot of hard work and persistence by the project team we have managed to recover a very small number of GLS devices from returning birds in 2012 and 2013. The initial results are surprising, and are revealing significant differences in migration strategy between birds from Mallorca and Menorca. We are keeping BOU informed about these results (they are currently assessing the first British record of Yelkouan Shearwater), and intend to publish one or more papers on these results in the next 12–24 months.

Rat eradication programme

In early 2011 the Balearic Island government co-ordinated a rat eradication programme on Sa Dragonera, the island off northwest Mallorca where our fieldwork base is located. This programme appears to have been successful, with no confirmed rat sightings in the intervening two years. In order to assess the impact on breeding Balearic Shearwaters a census of the island was established in spring 2013, spearheaded by Greg Morgan (RSPB warden on Ramsey Island, Wales). A series of census plots was identified, and the numbers of occupied burrows established through visual confirmation or tape playback. Greg has recently submitted the results of this work to the Seabird Group journal, *Seabird*. A small number of GLS were also deployed on birds from Sa Dragonera, discovered during this census work, to test whether birds from this island have the same migration strategies as those from the Mallorcan mainland and Menorca.

Plate 18. A 'Menorcan' Shearwater at La Mola, Menorca; in the hand these birds look more like Yelkouan than Balearic Shearwaters. © *Russell Wynn* **Plate 19.** Rhiannon abseils into a cave on Sa Dragonera, supervised from below by Tim. © *All Russell Wynn*

Acknowledgements

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The 2012–13 Project Shearwater expedition teams; Russell Wynn, Rhiannon Meier, Alice Jones and Lavinia Suberg (SeaWatch SW and National Oceanography Centre, UK). Tim Guilford (University of Oxford, UK) and Louise Maurice (British Geological Survey, UK). Greg Morgan (RSPB, UK). Miguel McMinn and Ana Rodriguez (Skua SLP and Balearic Shearwater Tours, Mallorca).

Plate 20. The team undertaking Balearic Shearwater census work on the rugged slopes of Sa Dragonera. © *Russell Wynn*

Seabird fluctuations

by WRP Bourne

In a commentary on a Scottish National Heritage Trend Note on "Biodiversity: Seabirds in Scotland" describing recent general seabird declines W.T.S. Miles (2013) states "Seabird monitoring gives a rare insight into the state of ocean habitats and marine ecological communities, because in terms of marine food chains seabirds sit right at the top of the card house...". The trouble with this popular belief is that seabirds are by no means at the top of the marine ecological web, which is occupied by fish and mammals, and only occur on the periphery. Their marginal position is seldom recognised, but explains their present fortunes. In the nineteenth century both marine birds and mammals were heavily exploited, but there were apparently plenty of fish. Since then the birds and mammals have been protected, and it is the fish that have been over-exploited. The removal of large fish results in a proliferation of the small fish, which they, and birds, eat, so in the 20th century the seabirds had a ball. Now that fisheries are beginning to be better-managed (Fernandes and Cook 2013) it is hardly surprising that the ball is coming to an end.

Certain events become explicable in the light of this. In the middle of the last century there were a number of seabird disasters both when aquatic species were in moult in the late summer and during the winter, attributed at the time to pollution, though they were usually precipitated by bad weather. Nobody questioned seabird productivity at that time, and in retrospect it may be wondered if it was a consequence of over-population. Now we hear of fewer and smaller disasters, but there is more concern about breeding success. The weather again appears to be an important factor, but there also appears to be a failure of food supplies. Can it be that these are now being eaten up by larger fish again (Bourne 2012, Smout and Stewart 2013)? One hoped this problem would be dealt with by the late Roger Bailey, an ornithologist who ended up in charge of ICES NW European fishery statistics, but sadly he was unable to complete his book. Meanwhile improvements in the management of fisheries to return to a more natural state in the sea may be bad for seabirds.

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Plates 21–22. Gannet, North Atlantic, September 2012. © *Chris Patrick*

Gannet with damaged bill

by Lieutenant Chris Patrick RN

In early September 2012, whilst at sea in the North Atlantic approximately 300 miles S of Iceland, I saw in the distance an adult Gannet *Morus bassanus* which appeared to be carrying a fish in its bill. This roused my attention, as this is something I had never seen before. As the bird approached closer it became apparent that the object dangling down from its bill was actually the distal half of its lower mandible on a flap of skin that had been the underside of the base of its bill. A small area right at the base of the wound was red and fairly fresh, probably because it was not able to heal whilst constantly swinging around, but near the dislocated section of bill the wound appeared dark and dry. The bird spent about half an hour flying around and alongside the ship in typical Gannet fashion but was not seen to dive or feed. Its plumage was in fairly poor condition, consistent with an inability to preen. It is not possible to ascertain how the damage was done but I assume a great deal of force was needed, perhaps by hitting a submerged solid object when diving. The injury may have been exacerbated by repeated dives, tearing the flap of skin back further. It is also impossible to say how long the bird had survived with this injury, or give a prognosis for its future survival, but the fact that it was far out at sea and that parts of the wound did not appear to be fresh would indicate that the accident had happened long enough ago that the bird would have starved to death had it not been able to find food for itself.

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Plate 23. Snowy Sheathbill. © *S Copsey*

A Corporate view of the Invincible Falkland Pigeon

by Commander F Milner RN

The article below was first published in Sea Swallow in 1983. Commander Francis Milner, the author, was Commander (Air) in the aircraft carrier HMS Invincible *during the Falklands war of 1982 - Operation Corporate.*

The unexpected ringing of the telephone at 6 am is always an unpleasant experience, none more so than when the voice suggests you should return to your ship as soon as possible. Other unaccustomed words such as Junta, Galtieri, scrap merchants, South Georgia and Malvinas all struggled to make their impact on my fast awakening consciousness. Eight months later I joined the RNBWS after having experienced the events of a lifetime, not least of which was the opportunity to observe many seabirds over a relatively long period in a confined area of the South Atlantic.

Plate 24. Francis Milner. © *S Milner*

HMS *Invincible* sailed on Operation Corporate from Portsmouth on 5 April 1982, made a fast passage outside the shipping lanes to Ascension Island (16 April) and arrived in the vicinity of the Falkland Islands on 30 April. For the next 50 days we then operated more or less within 50 miles of 52°S 56°W, some 100 miles to the east of Port Stanley and inside the 200 mile Total Exclusion Zone (TEZ) around the Falkland Islands.

The weather during this time fell into three distinct patterns. First there were the days which were spent in thick fog. Usually the wind was in the northwest and varied in strength from nil to 20 knots. The fog was generally 100 to 400 feet thick and little bird activity was discernible. This was hardly surprising, for frequently we

could not even see our own helicopters on the stern. The second weather pattern emerged when the wind was in the southwest. Usually the wind strength was force 6–8 and very heavy seas, low cloud, rain and poor visibility were the order of the day. The third pattern gave us fine sunny days, glorious flying weather and crystal clear visibility, and these were the days when the carrier battle group was most susceptible to air attack. They were also the best days to study our many seabird visitors such as the Black-browed Albatross *Diomedea melanophris,* the Wandering Albatross *Diomedea exulans,* Grey-headed Albatross *Diomedea chrysostoma,* Southern Giant Petrel *Macronectes giganteus,* Dove Prion *Pachyptila desolata,* Cape Pigeon *Daption capensis,* and most of all the Yellow-billed Sheathbill *Chionis alba.* Other birds were in evidence, but the above represented the most frequent customers in our circuit.

In general, most of the albatrosses, petrels and prions had a well developed sense of flight safety, maintaining good vertical or horizontal separation from returning aircraft. The low flying albatrosses and prions achieved vertical separation, whilst the petrels, which were usually at about 50 feet altitude, generally took lateral avoiding action. The sheathbills, on the other hand, were all potential candidates for the RN Flight Safety Course, since they seemed to have little awareness of the approach of an aircraft until very late. However, notwithstanding the sheathbills' low flight safety rating this article is principally devoted to their interaction with our ship since they were the only seabirds to take advantage of the opportunity to qualify for deck landing certificates.

The sheathbill seems to have at least three common names, and in our ignorance we gave it a fourth. Captain Tuck's most helpful *Field Guide to Sea Birds of Britain and the World* refers to the Yellow-billed Sheathbill but Robin Wood's book *Falkland Islands Birds* refers to the bird as the Snowy Sheathbill and also mentions the local name of Kelp Pigeon. That last informal name made sense, for so pigeon-like are these birds that we gave them our own name of Falkland Pigeon and their sudden arrival on our first day in the TEZ seemed to us a favourable omen. Four birds joined the ship on 1 May and remained in or on the ship until 4 May - the day on which HMS *Sheffield* was hit.

In appearance these birds had a completely white plumage and black legs, with no discernable web between the toes. Their bills were short, stubby and dirty yellow in colour with a black tip, and the wattle at the base of the bill was most pronounced. Their flight beats appeared strong but laboured, and they lacked the grace of an albatross and the agility of a Wood Pigeon.

During the first day they remained quite close to the ship, usually on the beam, and their general flying height was about 10–20 feet above the waves, with the odd excursions up to the ship's flight deck level (59 feet). They usually remained as a group of four although they occasionally split into two pairs.

2 May saw the first deck landings by what appeared to be the same group of four sheathbills. Once on board they strutted up and down the 600 foot long flight deck pecking at the numerous ringbolts placed at regular intervals all over the deck. The ringbolt recesses obviously provided a fascination for them, perhaps because they represented potential sources of food and fresh water, but their search was generally unrewarded. It became necessary to chase them away before launching our Sea Harriers, but the sheathbills seemed very reluctant to leave. Once airborne they would rapidly select a clear area and land again. They were also fairly tame, allowing the flight deck teams to approach very close in spite of being shouted and waved at. The most successful tactic for getting them off the flight deck was to herd them up to the top of

the ski-jump and then give them a loud BOO over the flight deck broadcast. This always had the desired effect of launching them, followed shortly by the Sea Harriers.

The ski-jump, which was a 90 foot 55 ton sloping structure of 7 degrees at the foremost part of the flight deck, always caused the sheathbills problems because of the variation in wind strength over its length. It was rare for there to be less than 20 knots over the deck and this caused the birds to tack from side to side as they climbed up to the top. Once at the top they would frequently be blown over and tumble down the slope like some novice skier or drunk. All this gave us much amusement and on one occasion also gave us the rare opportunity of catching one. He was a bit battered, but after being placed in a sheltered area recovered quickly and was soon airborne again or scavenging among the ringbolts.

At 1800 on 4 May the four sheathbills took departure from the ship, and it was not until 12 May that we were revisited. My diary entry for 12 May reads: "Dawn action stations. Weather improving (from thick fog of the last two days). Skies clear and visibility good but wind in excess of 30 knots all day. During the afternoon, air raids developed on HMS *Glasgow* and HMS *Broadsword* inshore. Return of the sheathbills observed at 1515. Seas quite rough now" This time we were graced with greater numbers, ten being the greatest number at any one time. They landed on deck at frequent intervals and still had difficulty mastering the slope of the ski-jump, but their awareness of aircraft had improved. By this time there were considerable numbers of merchant ships in our vicinity and we received less dedicated attention from our Falklands Pigeons. They remained with us until 21 May when the landings at San Carlos took place.

The final period when we were again under scrutiny from our sheathbills was from 10–14 June, this time from numbers varying from six to ten. Their pattern of behaviour was as before, flying around the ship and sometimes resting on the deck. It was during this period that our first sheathbill night deck landings were made, but by only one or two of them. Whenever on deck they settled into the same routine of ringbolt scavenging and ski-jump climbing. They always seemed to be surprised when bowled over by the wind and rarely gave up the attempt at achieving a perch on the top of the ski-jump.

Was it an omen that our first encounter was on the day we entered the TEZ and our last on the day of the Argentine surrender in Port Stanley? It seems strange that despite our continued presence in the vicinity of the Falklands, both inshore and offshore until 28 August, no further sheathbills ever came our way.

My final war diary entry for 15 June reads: "0330 ceased all helo flying owing to intensity of gale. For the first time for 71 days, weather stops flying. Dawn reveals storm lashed seas, ship pitching 3 to 4 degrees. No birds in sight. Will our friends the sheathbills return? Now that the Argentines have surrendered ashore, will they have the stomach to continue air attacks? I hope and think not".

"*At length did cross a Sheathèd bill.*
Through the mists it came
As if it had been a messenger.
We hailed it in His name."

With apologies to ST Coleridge

Francis Milner

Plate 25. New Zealand Storm-petrel. © *Martin Berg*

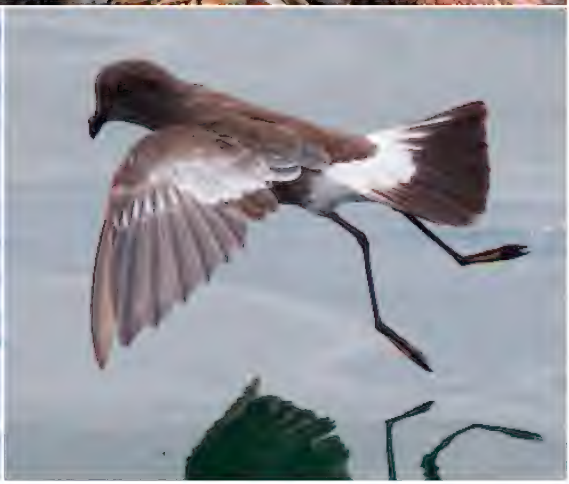
New Pacific Storm-petrels

by WRP Bourne

The New Zealand Storm-petrel

Ten years ago the seabird news of the year was the rediscovery of the New Zealand Storm-petrel, *Pealeornis maoriana,* lost for over a century, in the Hauraki Gulf off Auckland. This led to a hunt for its breeding-place, in case it might need conservation. Its discovery is described by Chris Gaskin (2013). It was seen on 286 out of 615 surveys at sea, and its identity was confirmed when one came on board a fishing-boat. It was found that they could be attracted by 'chum', and a net attached to four projectiles fired from tubes by compressed air was devised to catch them. It was found that the birds had bare brood-patches between February and May, when they must have been breeding locally, rather late in the season, but attempts to find them nesting on the smaller local islets were unsuccessful. A number of birds were fitted with 1g VHF transmitters with a life of fifty days and range of about nine kilometers. These were stuck to their tail feathers, and receivers were located on the largest local potential breeding place, the extinct volcano Little Barrier Island, a major seabird breeding site. In due course nests were found in rocky ravines half way up its side, and the article ends with a photograph of a chick of this 'extinct' bird. Since cats and Pacific rats (Kiore) have now been eliminated from the island the birds should be safe. (I am indebted to David and Ruth Crockett, who themselves rediscovered the lost Chatham Island Taiko *Pterodroma magentae*, for a copy of the article).

Plate 26 (above). Four New Zealand Storm-petrels. © *Peter Harrison;* **Plates 27–31 (right).** **Top left:** Pincoya Storm-petrel. © *Peter Harrison;* **Top right:** Peter Harrison. © *Peter Harrison;* **Centre:** New Zealand Storm-petrel chick. ©. *Leigh Joyce;* **Bottom left:** New Caledonian Storm-petrel. © *Peter Harrison;* **Bottom right:** Pincoya Storm-petrel. © *Peter Harrison*



The Pincoya Storm-petrel

In 1972 and 1983 Andor Kovacs preserved two storm-petrels identified first as Wilson's Petrel *Oceanites oceanicus* and then as Elliot's Storm-petrel *O. gracilis,* at El Bolson on the Argentine–Chilean border, which follows the continental divide (though it seems questionable if they can have got there naturally; presumably they came from the Chilean coast 80km to the west). This bird was apparently first seen at sea near Isla Guar in Seno Reloncavi off Puerto Montt by Peter Harrison in March 1983, and on 9 September of that year Gerry Clark reports in his notes that he observed flocks of 62 and ten Wilson-type petrels feeding with mixed diving-petrels further out in the Golfo de Ancud during his voyage round the Southern Ocean in his yacht *Totorore*, though he did not record more than a drawing on Map 6 in his book (Clark 1988). Following further reports of the birds at sea and the discovery of Kovac's specimens, a team which included people with experience of finding and catching the long-lost New Zealand Storm-petrel then observed over 3,000 birds in the same area during February 2011 (Harrison *et al.*). They took over 2,000 photographs, caught 14 birds and collected one, described as the type of a new species, the Pincoya Storm-petrel *Oceanites pincoyae,* 2013). The new species is similar to a small Wilson's Petrel with a white ulnar wing-bar, underwing, lower belly, extensive rump and outer vanes to the tail feathers, and a long middle toe, possibly associated with a habit of running with wings closed and feet below the sea surface (mouse-runs). They gather in flocks to feed and rest on the water, and are found throughout the year in a limited area in the more sheltered approaches to Puerto Montt, where they are the commonest seabird.

The 'New Caledonia' Storm-petrel

The latest development is a number of reports of a bird rather like the New Zealand Storm-petrel but larger with a darker underwing and different 'jizz', around New Caledonia (Collins 2013). We are indebted to Peter Harrison for a photo, but the bird has not been caught yet. When that happens it will doubtless become world news. Meanwhile it has been suggested it may be Peale's *Thalassidroma lineata* from the tropical Pacific. I have discussed this bird in the past (Bourne 2008), reproducing the original figure, which is certainly very like the bird from New Caledonia. However, there seems no reason to doubt Murphy and Snyder's identification of the surviving specimen as an aberrant Black-bellied Storm-petrel, and I suggested that there had been an exchange of type locality with Peale's Collared Petrel *Procellaria brevipes*, improbably said to come from the Antarctic. In fact, it seems high time that people, instead of dredging the literature for yet more improbable forgotten forms, face up to the fact that they may have found yet another new form of storm-petrel.

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Plate 32. MV Black Watch. © *Ken Logan*

Birdwatching from cruise ships

by D K Ballance

David Ballance, a retired schoolmaster, has for some years undertaken bird watching voyages in cargo ships, and his many sightings have been recorded in Sea Swallow and placed on the RNBWS database. Here he describes his more recent endeavours: voyaging in cruise ships.

If you have ever been on a cruise, or even made an enquiry about one, you will soon have become used to the daily muffled thud of seductive brochures as they land on your door mat. They promise you unforgettable luxury, and in the photos elegant figures parade the decks, gaze with awe at classical ruins or friendly penguins, and meditate in well stocked libraries.

The organisers seem to do a good job for hedonists and obedient lemmings, but what is there for ornithologists, or even for us more casual birdwatchers? We may recoil with distaste, or even with horror, from the promised excesses, but there is no need to do so. If we don't like the formality, we can avoid it; we do not have to overeat, and there are often interesting people to talk to. In some ways the life is that of a very comfortable boarding school, except that one does not have to attend any lessons, or even the Captain's receptions.

As some readers may know, I was for many years a devotee of freighter voyages, and in ten years following my retirement I made twelve of these. However, the insurance requirements became difficult, since no doctor travels in such ships, and if my interest in seabirds was to be sustained I had to try the cruising option. Thus it was that in 2009 I made my first cruise ship voyage and I have now made a total of six. They have all been on just two ships, the *Discovery* and the *Black Watch*, which as cruise ships go are pretty small and personal - those horizontal skyscrapers are not for me.

My main interest during all my voyages has been the sea birds (and also land birds at sea of course), and I always maintain a full daily log, for which a day at sea is divided into 3 or 4 watches. I also carry a personal GPS, since only the noon position is published on a cruise ship, and I have my own chart.

I have missed two features of freighter travel. The first is that access to the bridge is unrestricted, and the bridge wings are usually excellent places for observation. You know the ship's position the whole time, you can share the daily banter on the bridge and you thus get some feeling of the stresses and strains of the Master and his Officers. You also learn that Spaniards have no breakfast and that Italians play not the slightest attention to wildlife, even to a Humpback Whale's tail flip. The second advantage of freighter travel is that in suitable weather you can go to the forepeak, where a curious albatross can pass within touching distance, and from which I can remember seeing Abbott's Booby, Murphy's Petrel and long lines of Guanay Cormorants passing to seaward in a Peruvian dawn.

That said, not all is bad about cruise ships. *Black Watch's* bar, atop the bridge, provided an excellent forward observation post, and from there I could in comfort watch the waves in a Denmark Strait gale breaking over the bows and carrying away the jackstaff. *Black Watch* also has the great advantage of a promenade deck which goes round the ship on a single level. On this, or on the higher levels around the funnel and the mini golf range, you may have the dawn to yourself, and then descend to an excellent buffet breakfast before the health-conscious lemmings begin their carefully counted circuits of atonement for their éclairs at afternoon tea.

Plates 33–35. Left: Wilson's Storm-petrel; **Right, top:** Laughing Gull, Key West; **Right, bottom:** Masked Booby off NE Brazil. © *All Ken Logan*

Some vessels carry natural history lecturers, who may be found on deck from time to time casting a glance over the sea, but if the route is one where seabirds are prominent, you will be likely to spot the real enthusiasts on the first day. On a February voyage north along the Benguela Current from Cape Town to Walvis Bay, where a variety of southern and northern species was almost constantly in view, a group of four of us provided an identification consultancy on the promenade deck beneath the bridge. We had lots of enquiries, and indeed thought of putting a cap down to invite contributions. As we approached Walvis Bay, one old lady told us that she had always wanted to see an albatross. Alas, the last Yellow-nosed had just dropped astern, and we could not oblige with anything better than a White-chinned Petrel. What a pity; that lady had been on board all the way from New Zealand to Durban, and no-one had shown her that one albatross she wanted; this during a voyage where she might have seen every one of the Southern species.

Migrating landbirds are always a pleasure, and the observer on a cruise ship in the Mediterranean during the autumn should pray for sudden rainstorms, for these are liable to bring down a surprising variety of sodden passerines. Fellow passengers will always tell you of encounters with 'little greenish birds', which by the time you have moved to the right area of the ship have invariably taken refuge in a lifeboat or begun another hopeless circuit looking for a landing place.

You should not expect too much from shore excursions, though there can be some pleasant surprises. These trips are expensive, are best booked in advance, and seldom go exactly where you would like them to. Also, they more or less condemn you to a non-stop commentary, on the coach or off it. Fortunately there are now bird field guides for almost everywhere in the world, and plenty of 'Where to watch' books (but do not imagine that the ship's oddly assorted library will contain them). One can also make private arrangements with a local taxi driver. In the West Indies, where the island avifauna (except in the larger islands) is very restricted in scope but surprisingly diverse, it is best to assemble beforehand a list of what you might reasonably expect to see in one short hot day. Typically, your ship will come alongside or anchor just after dawn; you will be let off from about nine until five, and you will sail at nightfall to repeat the procedure at another forest-topped hump next day. You will thus not have the dawn and dusk periods ashore which are so essential to tropical birding. Another snag; many of the island endemics are rare and live in remote corners. You would be very lucky indeed for example to see a Montserrat Oriole (or even get to that island at all). Yet the Jago Sparrow gave no problems in the Cape Verdes, and the famous Palm Chat of Hispaniola, the sole member of its family, which I had slim hope of finding, turned out to be a common bird in San Domingo itself, and well known even to our urban guide. At Gran Turk, an apparently uninteresting reef in a fantastically blue sea, the shopping area behind the terminal was flooded with thousands of people from a neighbouring Disney-themed cruise ship, yet we had only to cross the road behind to find ourselves among abandoned salt pans with a wide variety of wintering waders to provide identification practice for a whole (but torrid) morning.

One does become gradually adapted to the curious unreality of a floating hotel, where people are seldom encouraged to take a look beyond the saloon windows, but where they are still inclined to complain. I remember on one trip fierce gales forcing the ship south out of the way of icebergs, and complaints that the ship had cancelled landings in Greenland and in Iceland (*"both of which we had paid for"*).

Plates 36–40 (overleaf). **Top Left:** Masked Booby, sub-adult, Caribbean; **Top right:** Brown Booby, Caribbean; **Centre:** Inca Tern; **Bottom Left:** Pink-footed Shearwater; **Bottom Right:** Great Shearwater, South Atlantic. © *All Ken Logan*

Plate 41. Black-browed Albatross, Beagle Channel. © *Ken Logan*

My own complaint is that I have still to see Rockall, which yet could have been achieved on two occasions with only a slight diversion of course but I was grateful to one enterprising Master who took us on a circuit of a buoy which marks, off the coast of Guinea, the intersection of the Equator with the Greenwich Meridian. I was also pleased to note that my GPS showed a satisfying line of noughts! (But who pays for that buoy and its miles of cable, I wonder?)

There is a wide choice of routes. In the Northern winter vessels tend to circumnavigate the globe in a little more than eighty days, but you can join for just a section of the circuit; and in the spring the final leg can be in March or April, homeward from the Persian Gulf or the West Indies, where there is a lot of migration to be seen. In the summer, most vessels are in northern waters; they can now penetrate not only to Spitzbergen but even to the Barents and White Seas, as well as to Iceland and the southern tip of Greenland. The Western Atlantic is usually avoided during the hurricane season.

I want to end this on a serious and practical note. I believe there is room for some kind of partnership to be developed between RNBWS, the major cruise lines and their lecturers, and the conservation organisations, with a view to improving the standard and frequency of recording and the awareness of officers and passengers. Cruise liners, with their huge numbers of relatively affluent travellers, might surely play a part in fund raising too, for example to support de-ratting and measures to diminish by-catch; there are plenty of worthy causes. I hope the RNBWS will show some initiative here.

My thanks to my friend and fellow passenger, Ken Logan, who took the photographs.

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Bratton Lane, Minehead, Somerset TA24 8SQ.

Plate 42. Cape Petrel. © *Steve Copsey*

Return from the Falklands via the west coast of South America

by CPO Steve Copsey

HMS *York* departed from Mare Harbour in the Falkland Islands on 18 May 2011; an all too brief visit had come to an end. We headed west into heavy seas alive with Black-browed and Grey-headed Albatrosses, Giant Petrels and Slender-billed Prions, and arrived at the entrance to the Magellan Straits. As the ship passed through the narrows just south of San Gregorio I enjoyed the most unexpected sighting of the trip: three Lesser Rheas standing on top of a small rise just above the shore. From a distance they looked liked sheep as they bent over feeding, but something about them didn't seem quite right so I rattled off a few shots on the camera. When I zoomed in, one of the sheep had kindly lifted its head and there was the unmistakeable shape of a Rhea; just one more benefit of digital photography.

Twenty four hours later we were heading north through the breathtaking scenery of the Patagonian Channels. The birder in me would have preferred to exit the Straits into the Pacific and have the extra two days of South Pacific specialities but I have to admit that going through the tortuous leads between the offshore islands and the mainland was a once in a lifetime experience. That said, not all seafarers enjoy the passage and the many shipwrecks along the route reminded us of its hazards.

Not a great many seabirds were to be seen over this period, but several Southern Fulmars, a single Magellan Diving Petrel and three Southern Giant Petrels were very welcome.

HMS *York* finally entered the Pacific Ocean on the morning of 22 May and to the astonishment of the ships company, who were expecting sunshine and a calm sea we ran straight into a force eight gale. This was fine by me for I enjoyed one of the best sea-watching days of the trip, with seven Albatross species sighted. Salvin's Albatross was a new life bird for me and by the day's end I had seen twenty six. Northern Royal Albatrosses were also seen in small numbers. There can be a lot of confusion between the two Royal Albatross species. The dark winged juveniles cause the biggest headache. Fortunately I managed to get several shots of both Southern and Northern Royals off the Chilean coast and, whilst I would not stake my mortgage on it, I am reasonably confident I achieved the correct identification in the majority of cases. The three Albatross species above breed on the opposite side of the South Pacific and are non-breeding visitors to the Chilean coast, attracted by the Humboldt Current. This current, which is described as the most productive marine ecosystem in the world, flows north along the South American coast from the Antarctic to the equator. This upwelling creates perfect conditions for plankton, which in turn results in abundant numbers of fish, birds and marine mammals higher up the food chain.

Black-browed, Grey Headed, Light-mantled and Wandering Albatross made up the magnificent seven for the day. Slender-billed Prions in numbers estimated at around two thousand were by far the most common species seen during this and subsequent days. Wilson's Storm-petrels, White-chinned Petrels and Southern Fulmars in their hundreds provided the supporting cast. Cape Petrels were present, as ever, feeding and wheeling in the wake.

The next few days were equally interesting, with the addition of six Red-legged Shags as we neared the coast, and several Chilean Skuas. One of these continually harried an unfortunate Black-browed Albatross, leaving it only once it had forced the larger bird to crash into the sea.

A single Shy Albatross on 24 May was followed by several Bulwer's the following day, my tenth and eleventh Albatross species for the trip. Wilson's Storm-petrels had now taken over as the most common bird, and on most days there were upwards of fifty birds, with small flocks pattering in the ship's wake regardless of the sea state and weather conditions.

Plate 43. Wreck in the Patagonian Channel. © *Steve Copsey*

The weather was starting to improve now and as the temperature increased new birds came near the ship. De Filipi's Petrels were seen in their dozens as we neared the border of Peru and the odd White-bellied Storm-petrel flitted into view. Peruvian Pelicans and Boobies became more commonplace, with the addition of Hornby's and Markham's Storm-petrels (both new life birds for me). Unlike the majority of storm-petrels, the identification of the last two was no major challenge.

The ship arrived in Callao, the port of Lima, the Peruvian capital, on 29 May and as we neared land large numbers of rafting Shearwaters were encountered. About 800 Sooty Shearwaters were put to flight as the ship passed and on closer inspection I counted approximately 40 Pink-footed Shearwaters among them. The 12th and final species of Albatross for the trip came into view an hour before we docked. Three Waved Albatrosses, the only member of the family to breed in the tropics, came fairly close by but were never as trusting as the birds further south. The long yellow bill, which looks disproportionally large for the bird's head, can be seen at great distance. I was hoping for some decent shots of this species but I had to be satisfied with distant record shots. My last species of Penguin also made it onto the trip list: two small parties of Humboldt Penguins were out fishing and, as an added bonus the first Inca Terns of the trip were hovering above hoping to pick up scraps. Grey and Band-tailed Gulls were seen as we docked along with a single Guanay Cormorant.

Inca Terns and Peruvian Pelicans were perched on the dockside and, as you would expect, Band-tailed Gulls were always in the vicinity of the rubbish skip looking for a free meal. The ship departed from Lima after four days with a very successful visit into the western Andes to reflect on. Heading back into the Eastern Pacific, I enjoyed another great day of sea watching. Six species of storm petrel were the highlight; Elliot's and Wedge-rumped Storm-petrels now joined the more familiar Wilson's, White-bellied, Markham's and Hornby's. Elliot's Storm-petrel (also known as White-vented Storm-petrel) and Wedge-rumped Storm-petrel can be difficult to identify successfully at sea. Both are fairly small, dark, and superficially similar to Wilson's. Again the digital camera came to the rescue. I sat in the bow of the ship and any storm-petrel that passed by was soon followed by the lens and numerous shots were rattled off. I could then review the images in the evening to make positive identifications. In this particular instance the inconspicuous vent of Elliot's and the extensive white on the tail of the Wedge-rumped could both be seen in at least some of the many images.

As we passed close to the Galapagos Islands (I would have preferred closer!), Swallow-tailed Gulls started to appear, with 41 on 3 June. This species is highly pelagic, so it was a hoped-for life tick. Blue-footed Boobies, another breeder from the nearby islands, now started to be seen more frequently. On 5 June I was able to record my only Galapagos Petrel of the Pacific voyage. However, it was a significant sighting because I had now reached my original target of 100 seabird species, so it was a cause for minor celebration. In contrast to the single petrel, 550 Galapagos Shearwaters were seen before our arrival at the Panama City anchorage. Whilst waiting our turn to transit through the Canal we had the pleasure of numerous Magnificent Frigatebirds overflying the anchored ships. Small flocks of Neotropic Cormorants passed by and the first Brown Pelicans were seen whilst viewing an impressive looking Panama City. Unfortunately our canal transit was scheduled for overnight, so the much hoped for jungle specialties that I first enjoyed when I transited on HMS

Plates 44–48. **Top Left:** Markham's Storm-petrel; **Top right:** White-tailed Tropicbird, Bermuda; **Middle:** Peruvian Pelicans in Callao harbour; **Bottom left:** Magnificent Frigate Bird; **Bottom right:** Hornby's Storm-petrel. © *All Steve Copsey*

Plate 54. Chilean Skua chasing Black-browed Albatross. © *Steve Copsey*

Edinburgh in 2001 were missed. As evening approached, we passed a small party of roosting Royal and Sandwich Terns on an abandoned jetty not far from where we entered Miraflores lock. A single American Crocodile was a very unexpected bonus before night finally fell.

The Caribbean as usual was rather quiet. A single Audubon's Shearwater was the only reward for many hours watching. The entry into Key West for a much anticipated visit produced both Common and Least Terns and a drive through the Florida Keys to the Everglades National Park next day added Double-crested Cormorant to the tally.

The next port of call was the old Royal Navy dockyard in Bermuda, always a popular visit for any ships company, and what was to be nearly my last seabird of the trip was common and easy to see. The White-tailed Tropicbird, known locally as the Bermuda Longtail, is a stunning species and very obvious as the adults displayed and chased one another around the harbour. Back at sea for the final leg, the north Atlantic in late June was not very productive, and I assumed this was down to the fact that most northern species were now at their breeding grounds. The final stop for York was the Azores and, as expected, Cory's Shearwaters were encountered frequently within 100 miles of the islands. HMS *York* arrived back in British waters on 6 July and as the ship passed through the narrows adjacent to Hurst Castle the final seabirds of the trip were seen: three Little Terns fishing inside the Solent. These were the last entry on my list; the total tally had hit 113.

My target of 100 seabirds for the deployment had thus been achieved and I have to say I thoroughly enjoyed the five months I was away. There were many highlights over the period, but the most lasting memory will be of the Wandering Albatrosses of South Georgia.

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Plates 49–53. Top left: Black-browed Albatross, SE Pacific; **Top right:** Salvin's Albatross; **Middle:** Least Terns, Grassy Key, Florida; **Bottom left:** Inca Tern, Callao docks; **Bottom right:** Slender-billed Prion. © *All Steve Copsey*

Plate 55. RMS St Helena, James Bay, St Helena, 15 Nov 2012. © *B. Rowlands*

Birds on a return trip, Ascension Island–St Helena, 29 October–23 November 2012

by Beau W. Rowlands

Introduction

This account takes in my seventh and eighth visits to Ascension Island and ninth to St Helena. Observations at sea are from 2 short runs of RMS *St Helena* (29–31 October and 15–18 November) between the two islands.

Using the ten-minute card method, counts were made daily off the port bow, mainly at 0730, 1200 and 1630. While most counts were in unbroken one-hour periods, the max for a full day (away from land) was three hours, with stern counts mainly at the start and end of each period.

This account forms an update to Rowlands (1991, 1992, 1995, 2001, 2003, 2011), and Rowlands *et al.* 1998. Copies of the data sheets are lodged with (1) the RNBWS, (2) the Environment and Natural Resources Directorate, Essex House, Jamestown, St Helena, (3) the Conservation Centre, Georgetown, Ascension Island, and (4) the Niven Library, University of Cape Town.

At St Helena, neither motorboat circumnavigations nor visits to the offshore islets were possible because of the rough seas. However, on 3 November (1645–1900 hrs) we joined a fishing charter launch *Gannet Three*, which sailed along the lee from Jamestown to Black Rock, landing men at various sites for overnight fishing, including Egg Island. On the way were good views also of Lighter Rock, Ladies Chair, Peaked Island and Thompson's Valley Island.

Species accounts

12 seabird species were identified (Harrison 1983). Where relevant, accounts are sub-headed, in date order, for (1) *Southbound leg*, (2) *St Helena*, (3) *Northbound leg*, and (4) *Ascension Island*. Stern counts are indicated. Also included below, for completeness, are resident island landbirds. Other fauna are included - see Discussion below.

Bulwer's Petrel *Bulweria bulwerii*. *Northbound leg*: Two sightings, singles, passing across bows (port to starboard), 16 Nov (1739), 12.8S 9.2W, and 17 Nov (1215), 10.5S 11.8W. Neither was diverted from its course by the vessel.

Madeiran Storm-petrel *Oceanodroma castro*. *St Helena*: *Gannet Three* launch trip, 3 Nov, *c* 300 birds, congregating at dusk over and around Egg Island (1800).

Red-billed Tropicbird *Phaethon aethereus*. *Southbound leg*: One seaward of Boatswainbird Island, Ascension, 29 Oct (1744), 07.9S 14.4W, and one, 31 Oct (1154), 15.3S 06.5W, first passing over the bows (port to starboard), before circling for about an hour. Present around anchorage on arrival St Helena, 31 Oct (1600). *St Helena*: Every day, 31 Oct–15 Nov, in Jamestown, over the wharf, in James Valley and along the sea-cliffs on either side; more numerous and active later in the day. Also present at intervals along the coast between Jamestown and Black Rock, 3 Nov (1700–1900), and frequently over Munden's, 12 Nov (around 1600). At least 6 active nests on Ladder Hill, 15 Nov (1214–1228), single chicks, one small and downy, the others early fledging (down on head and neck). One adult in attendance at each, and one nest an adult incubating. All were in nest holes, high up, overlooking the anchorage. *Northbound leg*: Present around anchorage on departure St Helena, 15 Nov (1740). One, at 13.5S 08.4W, passed the vessel on port side, towards St Helena, 16 Nov (1233).

White-tailed Tropic Bird *Phaethon lepturus*. *Ascension Island*: One in flight near Marty-Wade track, below White Horse Hill, 21 Nov (1206).

Plate 56. Red-billed Tropicbird *Phaethon aethereus*, over Jamestown, St Helena, 3 Nov 2012. © *B. Rowlands*

Masked Booby *Sula dactylatra*. *Southbound leg*: 3, 6, 1, 12, 1 and 7 birds, seaward of Boatswainbird Island, Ascension, 29 Oct (1720–1756). Two around anchorage on arrival St Helena, 31 Oct (1600). *St Helena*: Seen at intervals along coast between Jamestown and Black Rock, 3 Nov (1700–1900). Breeding in progress in the mainland colony, in the area of Lot's Wife Ponds, west of Sandy Bay, first reported 2009 (Bolton *et al.* 2011). Access was to two neighbouring nests, 7 Nov, the nearest to Sandy Bay, one an incubating adult (2 eggs, appearing fresh), and the other a large unattended chick, a fledgling, some down on head, moving about, exercising wings, with flight feathers well developed. Both nests were in line with breeding peaks in July–August and November (Bolton *et al.* 2011). *Northbound leg*: Present around anchorage on departure St Helena, 15 Nov (1740), and on approach to anchorage on arrival Ascension, 18 Nov (0800).

Brown Booby *Sula leucogaster*. *Southbound leg*: One alongside (to port), 31 Oct (1201), 15.3S 6.4W, 55 nm from St Helena. It rose up, high, disappearing into cloud. *St Helena*: One around anchorage on arrival, 31 Oct (1600). Singles at intervals along the coast between Jamestown and Black Rock, 3 Nov (1700–1900). *Northbound leg*: Present on approach to anchorage on arrival Ascension, 18 Nov (0800). *Ascension Island*: Three seen plunge-diving in Clarence Bay, beyond the breakers, 21 Nov (0825).

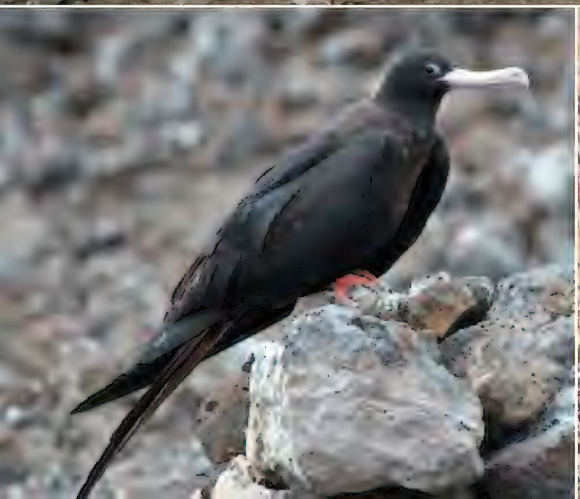
Ascension Frigatebird *Fregata aquila*. *Southbound leg*: On departure Ascension, 29 Oct, present in all 10-minute periods around N side of island from Georgetown anchorage (07.9S 14.4W, 1702) to E of Boatswainbird Island (1752), flying higher above the vessel than other species, counts of 12 birds at 1702, 10 at 1716, 15 at 1721, 10 at 1739, 7 at 1741, 3 at 1748 and 10 birds at 1752. *Northbound leg*: One (to port), 17 Nov, 09.9S 12.5W (1715). *Ascension Island*: At least 11 birds counted at roost in the Sooty Tern colony site at Mars Bay, 20 Nov (1322–1526). They were juveniles, females and 3 adult males (red sacs), the males in a separate group (1517–19). Fewer birds (no adult males seen) were present there on 22 Nov (1100–20).

Wirebird *Charadrius sanctaehelenae*. *St Helena*: Endemic (McCulloch 2004). Present on lower slopes, Flagstaff, 2 Nov (around 1700). Three nests, Man and Horse, 13 Nov (0930–1031) - two with 2 eggs, one nest 4 eggs (a record, according to Gavin Ellick, St Helena National Trust Wirebird Team). At the last, the sitting bird, injury-feigning, boldly came to within a metre of us. Present that day also at Broad Bottom (around 1330).

Southern Skua *Catharacta antarctica*. *Southbound leg*: Single bird, a stern count, just south of Ascension Island, 29 Oct, 08.0S 14.2W (1800–1825). It overtook, taking turns around the vessel before disappearing south.

Sooty Tern *Onychoprion fuscatus*. *Southbound leg*: On departure, Ascension, 29 Oct (1714), a single bird off Clarence Bay. *Northbound leg*: Present on approach to anchorage on arrival Ascension, 18 Nov (0800). *Ascension Island*: Breeding in progress, Mars Bay, 20 and 22 Nov, eggs fresh and hatching, small chicks, many with egg-tooth, sheltering under rocks, where in the heat on 22 Nov (around 1030) adults were in constant shuttle to and from the sea, scooping up water on the wing, maximum 6 scoops by one bird. Many eggs already predated upon by Indian Mynas *Acridotheres tristis*. At Waterside, 22 Nov (1331–1407), chicks were larger, fledging, forming crèches,

Plates 57-61. Nestling Red-billed Tropicbird *Phaethon aethereus*, Ladder Hill, St Helena, 15 Nov 2012; Red-billed Tropicbird *Phaethon aethereus*, Munden's, St Helena, 12 Nov 2012; White Terns *Gygis alba*, wooded area in lower grounds of Plantation House (Governor's Residence), St Helena, 6 Nov 2012; Sooty Tern *Onychoprion fuscatus* feeding chick, Waterside, Ascension Island, 22 Nov 2012; Sooty Tern *Onychoprion fuscatus*, Mars Bay, Ascension Island, 20 Nov 2012. © *All B. Rowlands*



though some still with traces of down, also many addled and abandoned eggs. Present at Mars Bay were ringed birds - one plain metallic ring on right leg, two plastic (green above, red below) on left. Searches of adult birds for geolocators (tracking devices), fitted by the Army Ornithological Society (AOS) - see Bray (2011), Hughes *et al.* (2012), Reynolds (2012), and Sea Swallow 61 pp 30–31 - were unsuccessful.

White Tern *Gygis alba*. *Southbound leg*: Present around anchorage on arrival St Helena, 31 Oct (1600). *St Helena*: In Jamestown, 31 Oct–15 Nov, present in Castle Gardens, behind the Museum and on St James' Church. Some 25 birds on and over Thompson's Valley Island, 3 Nov (1809), of which at least 8 were in flight just above, and 9 sitting tight on the vegetated crown of the islet (including two pairs close together), apparently incubating. Below Plantation House, 6 Nov (1211), a courting pair at roost in thick woods near the Butcher slave graves [death of Margaret Butcher 16 Nov 1777]. In Jamestown two pairs nesting on a window ledge heavily fouled with dropping, opposite the church entrance, 12 Nov (1215). Two birds present the same day in flight amongst Red-billed Tropicbirds off Munden's (1608). However, as before, the birds were absent from the James Bay wharf-side cliffs, a former regular roost (Rowlands *et al.* 1998:172, 173, Rowlands 2011), due to the wire mesh since installed (August 2008) to counter rockfalls (*St Helena Herald* Vol. IX No 43). *Northbound leg*: Present around anchorage on departure St Helena, 15 Nov (1740). *Ascension Island*: Two in flight to seaward of Cricket Valley, 21 Nov (1132).

Brown (Common) Noddy *Anous stolidus*. *Southbound leg*: One at 12.2S 09.8W, 30 Oct (1817). It flew across the bows, very close. One seen from bridge by the officer of the watch about an hour earlier. *St Helena*: Seen at intervals along the coast between Jamestown and Black Rock, 3 Nov (1700–1900). *Northbound leg*: Present on approach to anchorage on arrival Ascension, 18 Nov (0800).

Black Noddy *Anous minutus*. *St Helena*: On *Gannet Three* launch trip, 3 Nov, a few at dusk amongst Madeiran Storm-petrels over and around Egg Island (1800). Colony sites on Egg Island, Peaked Island and nearby mainland cliffs were not yet occupied.

Feral Pigeon *Columba livia*. *St Helena*: Present in and around Jamestown, including Castle Gardens and waterfront, 12 Nov (1153), where prolific, and other days (1–15 Nov), also Ruperts Bay and Luffkins Spring, 6 and 7 Nov.

Peaceful Dove *Geopelia striata*. *St Helena*: Jamestown, prolific in Castle Gardens and waterfront area, 12 Nov (1150 hrs) and other days (1–15 Nov), and a relatively easy photographic subject. Frequently displayed comfort behaviour when the sun was out, raising wings to sunbathe.

Common Myna *Acridotheres tristis*. *Ascension Island*: Present in Georgetown, 29 Oct and 18–23 Nov, also at Mars Bay, 20 and 22 Nov, where preying upon eggs of Sooty Terns. *St Helena*: Commonly present in the Castle Gardens and elsewhere around Jamestown and Half Tree Hollow, 31 Oct–15 Nov.

Madagascar Fody *Foudia madagascariensis*. *St Helena*: Red males present inland, road to High Peak, 10 and 11 Nov.

Plates 62–66. Peaceful Dove, *Geopelia striata*, Jamestown, St Helena, 3 Nov 2012; Young Masked Booby *Sula dactylatra* (not yet flown, but moving about), east of Lot's Wife Ponds, St Helena, 7 Nov 2012; Masked Booby *Sula dactylatra* incubating, east of Lot's Wife Ponds, St Helena, 7 Nov 2012; Ascension Frigatebird *Fregata aquila* (adult female), Mars Bay, Ascension Island, 20 Nov 2012; Wirebird or St Helena Plover, *Charadrius sanctaehelenae* (endemic), Man and Horse, St Helena, 13 Nov 2012. © *All B. Rowlands*

Plate 67. Sooty Tern *Onychoprion fuscatus* feeding chick, Ascension Island, 20 Nov 2012. © *B. Rowlands*

Common Waxbill *Estrilda astrild*. *St Helena*: Present in Castle Gardens, Jamestown, 1–15 Nov, and foraging along path to Munden's and Rupert's Bay, 12 Nov (1626 hrs).

Yellow Canary *Serinus flaviventris*. *St Helena*: Present in Castle Gardens, Jamestown, 1–15 Nov. Also at Rupert's Bay, 12 Nov (1337 hrs), and at Harlyn (in Half Tree Hollow), 15 Nov (0917 hrs).

Discussion

All the seabirds above, with the possible exception of the Southern Skua, were 'routine' observations. Of the 72 ten-minute cards completed, these being naturally-occurring port bow counts as an indication of seabird density, 59 are nil counts. The latter were mainly in waters away from Ascension and St Helena, reflecting a paucity of seabirds at sea compared with higher latitudes (e.g. Rowlands 2011).

Flying-fish, all large (presumably *Cheilopogon pinnatibarbatus* - Ryan 2007:124, 125) were seen only on 31 Oct (1 at 0800, 14.6S 07.2W, sea 20.5C), and 17 Nov (2 at 0750, 11.0S 11.1W, sea 22.7C; 3 at 1725, 09.8S 12.5W, sea 23.0C; 2 at 1757, 09.8S 12.6W, sea 23.0C).

Green Turtles *Chelonia mydas* were present beyond the breakers at Clarence Bay, Ascension Island. Fresh tracks of the new season, with 2 new diggings, were first seen on the beach on 21 November (0702–0710), whereas on 18 to 20 November only old diggings were present.

The only cetaceans noted, and these at St Helena, were a Humpback Whale *Megaptera novaeangliae* and her calf, seen from launch *Gannet Three* on 3 November (1830–1833). They were resting on the surface in a cove near Lighter Rock before sounding.

On Ascension Island, Land Crabs *Johngarthia lagostoma* (yellow morph) were readily found at the defunct NASA site at Devil's Ashpit, while Sally Lightfoot Shore Crabs *Grapsus adscensionis* were common on rocks and sandy beaches around Georgetown.

Two other ships were seen. They were the St Helena airport construction support vessel *NP Glory 4*, at Rupert's Bay, St Helena, 3 November, and a general cargo vessel, the *Ocean Charger*, off Georgetown, Ascension Island, on 18 November.

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Plate 68. Greater Sand Plover, Busaiteen beach. © *Howard King*

Bahrain, the second year

by Commander Chris Moorey, Defence Attaché, British Embassy, Manama

My first impressions piece in last year's edition of *Sea Swallow* looked at three sites in Bahrain where I had done most of my early birding: the British Embassy in Manama and two coastal sites at Bahrain Fort and Dowhat al Muharraq. Since I wrote that piece my family and I have moved to Al Jasra, on the west coast near the causeway to Saudi Arabia. It is in an agricultural area of the island and although I missed much of the Autumn migration flow through Jasra the Spring migration saw the area swamped with shrikes, wheatears and warblers - plus many more. I have to confess that I have rather neglected the coastal sites as a result. If, following this rather land bird-centric contribution, the Editor allows me another go next year, I'll endeavour to re-focus on sea and shore birds. Fortunately, after some 20 months of birding as a singleton, I have recently met up with Howard King, a field naturalist with an encyclopaedic knowledge of the birds of Bahrain. He has already showed me some rich birding sites so I am well set for a productive Autumn migration period.

Apart from my home village of Al Jasra, the sites selected for this report are two that featured last year: Bahrain Fort and the British Embassy garden, in central Manama.

Bahrain Fort lies on the north coast of the main island and has been a fortified settlement for many centuries. In its immediate vicinity are a number of villages, small-scale farms, beaches and extensive mudflats at low water. As I mentioned in my last report, the records detailed in Table 1 below have been somewhat limited by the author's lack of a telescope - a must for full coverage of the more distant mudflats. The figures for Bahrain Fort therefore represent only a proportion of those birds actually present at the site, being only those on the mudflats in the vicinity of the fort and the nearby beach.

Table 1. Selected ornithological records from Bahrain Fort May 12 to May 13.

Species	Comment/Count per visit
Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea*	Up to 8
Little Egret *Egretta garzetta*	One in Oct 12
Western Reef-Heron *Egretta gularis*	Average 3
Great Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo*	Peak numbers Dec 12–Mar 13. Maximum count 100 in Dec 12
Osprey *Pandion haliaetus*	One in Oct 12
Eurasian Oystercatcher *Haematopus ostralegus*	2 individuals - one day - Mar 13
Common Ringed Plover *Charadrius hiaticula*	Present Sep–Dec 12. Maximum count 10.
Grey Plover *Pluvialis squatarola*	Present throughout. Peak Sep 12–Jan 13. Maximum count 30.
Kentish Plover *Charadrius alexandrinus*	Present throughout. Peak Sep–Dec 12. Maximum count 100.
Greater Sand Plover *Charadrius leschenaultii*	Present throughout. Peak Sep 12–Jan 13. Maximum count 40.
Lesser Sand Plover *Charadrius atrifrons*	Present throughout. Peak Sep 12–Jan 13. Maximum count 400.
Caspian Plover *Charadrius asiaticus*	One in Jun 12
Kittlitz's Plover *Charadrius pecuarius*	One in Sep 12 - second record for Bahrain.
Pacific Golden Plover *Pluvialis fulva*	One in Oct 12
Ruddy Turnstone *Arenaria interpres*	Present throughout. Peak Sep 12–Jan 13. Maximum count 30.
Bar-tailed Godwit *Limosa lapponica*	Peak Sep 12–Jan 13. Maximum count 34.
Whimbrel *Numenius phaeopus*	Two in Oct 12, one in Dec 12 and one in Mar 13.
Eurasian Curlew *Numenius arquata*	Average 1–2, maximum count 5.
Common Redshank *Tringa totanus*	Usually 1–2 present. Maximum count 30 in Oct 12.
Common Greenshank *Tringa nebularia*	Present throughout, average 1–5.
Terek Sandpiper *Xenus cinereus*	One in Oct 12. 2 in Dec 12. 3 in Jan 13.
Little Stint *Calidris minuta*	Average 1–3 Oct–Dec 12
Dunlin *Calidris alpina*	Peak numbers Sep 12–Jan 13. Maximum count 400 in Oct 12.
Broad-billed Sandpiper *Limicola falcinellus*	10 in Sep 12
Armenian Gull *Larus armenicus*	Peak Dec 12–Mar 13. Up to 3
Yellow-legged Gull *Larus michahellis*	Peak Dec 12–Mar 13. Up to 15
Black-headed Gull *Chroicocephalus ridibundus*	Large numbers up to Sep 12–Apr 13 (up to 400)
Slender-billed Gull *Chroicocephalus genei*	Large numbers up to Sep 12–Apr 13 (up to 400)
Lesser Black-backed Gull *Larus fuscus*	Present Oct 12–Apr 13. Up to 6.
Gull-billed Tern *Gelochelidon nilotica*	Present Oct 12–Mar 13. Maximum count 50 in Oct 12.
White-cheeked Tern *Sterna repressa*	2 in Sep 12
Lesser Crested Tern *Sterna bengalensis*	Peak Oct–Dec 12. Maximum count 120.
European Roller *Coracias garrulus*	One in Oct 12
Pied Wheatear *Oenanthe pleschanka*	Several individuals (up to 5 per visit) on migration Oct 12 and Mar 13.
Black-eared Wheatear *Oenanthe melanoleuca*	One in Mar 13
Isabelline Wheatear *Oenanthe isabellina*	One in Mar 13
Isabelline Shrike *Lanius isabellinus*	One in Mar 13

As mentioned earlier, Al Jasra is a village on the west coast of the island, set in a farming area. As is the case everywhere in the northern part of Bahrain, the area is suffering from development, mainly in the form of new compounds. However, enough farmland remains to ensure very healthy migratory populations. Indeed, during March and April 2013, with a substantial area of neglected farmland having been recently hand-ploughed, scrutinizing the newly-created furrows was slightly akin to randomly-presented targets on a firing range, where a mixture of wheatears, pipits, wagtails and chats displayed themselves all-too-briefly on the ridges before disappearing again into the furrows. Among the predominantly land bird table below, I have listed a few waders, as the smallest and most temporary puddles created by over-zealous irrigation very quickly attract the attention of a wide variety of passing birds.

The British Embassy compound in Manama once stood on the northern coastline of the island but through reclamation work over the past 5 decades is now over 2 kilometres inland. It is an oasis of lawns, hedges, bushes and trees in an otherwise densely-populated part of urban Manama, and thus a beacon to migrating birds

Table 2. Selected ornithological records from Al Jasra May 12 to May 13.

Species	Comment/Count per visit
Eurasian Spoonbill *Platalea leucorodia*	One in Dec 12 (flying over)
Western Cattle Egret *Bubulcus ibis*	Present Sep 12–Apr 13. Maximum count 60
Little Egret *Egretta garzetta*	Two in Mar 13, one in Apr 13
Black-winged Stilt *Himantopus himantopus*	Present throughout in small numbers (up to 4)
Common Redshank *Tringa totanus*	One in Sep 12, one in Jan 13
Wood Sandpiper *Tringa glareola*	One in Apr 13
Common Sandpiper *Actitis hypoleucos*	One in Apr 13
Namaqua Dove *Oena capensis*	Up to 5
European Roller *Coracias garrulus*	One in Apr 13
Eurasian Hoopoe *Upupa epops*	Resident from Mar 13, may be breeding locally
European Bee-eater *Merops apiaster*	Peaks in Sep/Oct 12 and Apr 13. Maximum count 80
Red-backed Shrike *Lanius collurio*	Spring migration peak Apr–May 13, with maximum count 7
Isabelline Shrike *Lanius isabellinus*	Present except during height of Summer (May–Sep). Maximum count 5
Lesser Grey Shrike *Lanius minor*	As for Red-backed Shrike: Spring migration peak Apr–May 13, with maximum count 7
Great Grey Shrike *Lanius excubitor*	One in Apr 13
Woodchat Shrike *Lanius senator*	Singletons Mar, Apr and May 13
Masked Shrike *Lanius nubicus*	One in Mar 13
Grey Hypocolius *Hypocolius ampelinus*	Roost occupied Nov–Dec 12. Maximum count 20 but now understand a much larger roost is located nearby
Sand Martin *Riparia riparia*	One in Apr 13, one in May 13
Barn Swallow *Hirundo rustica*	Small numbers (up to 4) Sep–Oct 12 and Apr–May 13
Graceful Prinia *Prinia gracilis*	Abundant resident
Eastern Olivaceous Warbler *Iduna pallida*	One in Apr 13
Upcher's Warbler *Hippolais languida*	One in May 13
Willow Warbler *Phylloscopus trochilus*	Apr–May 13. Maximum count 4
Common Chiffchaff *Phylloscopus collybita*	Mar–Apr 13. Maximum count 2
Common Whitethroat *Sylvia communis*	Singletons Apr–May 13
Lesser Whitethroat *Sylvia curruca*	One individual 31 Mar–1 Apr 13
Bluethroat *Luscinia svecica*	One in Nov 12, one in Mar 13
Rufous-tailed Scrub-robin *Cercotrichas galactotes*	Common Apr–Sep
Black Redstart *Phoenicurus ochruros*	One in Apr 13
Common Redstart *Phoenicurus phoenicurus*	Singletons Mar, Apr and May 13
Whinchat *Saxicola rubetra*	Apr–May 13. Maximum count 5
Common Stonechat *Saxicola rubicola*	A pair over-wintered Dec 12–Mar 13
Northern Wheatear *Oenanthe oenanthe*	End Mar–early May 13. Maximum count 3
Black-eared Wheatear *Oenanthe melanoleuca*	Two in Mar 13
Pied Wheatear *Oenanthe pleschanka*	Mar–early Apr 13. Maximum count 20
Red-tailed Wheatear *Oenanthe chrysopygia*	One in Mar 13
Desert Wheatear *Oenanthe deserti*	One in Jan 13
Isabelline Wheatear *Oenanthe isabellina*	Dec 12–Apr 13. Maximum count 15
Spotted Flycatcher *Muscicapa striata*	Sep 12 and Mar–May 13. Maximum count 3
White-throated Munia *Lonchura malabarica*	Apr 13. Maximum count 3
Black-headed Wagtail *Motacilla (flava) feldegg*	One in Mar 13
Yellow Wagtail *Motacilla flava*	Apr–May 13. Maximum count 6
White Wagtail *Motacilla alba*	Dec 12–Apr 13. Maximum count 4
Tawny Pipit *Anthus campestris*	Mar–Apr 13. Maximum count 3
Red-throated Pipit *Anthus cervinus*	3 in Apr 13
Water Pipit *Anthus spinoletta*	Dec 12–Jan 13. Maximum count 4
Ortolan Bunting *Emberiza hortulana*	One in Sep 12

crossing the Arabian Gulf. Over the past 12 months an impressive array of migrating birds has again dropped in to feed and rest before continuing on their way to Africa or Eurasia. A highlight for me during this period was without doubt a female Grey Hypocolius foraging in a bush a few feet from my office window. The table below provides a brief summary of the more interesting records from the Embassy garden over the period May 12 to May 13.

Plates 69–70. Left: White-eared Bulbul, **Right:** Pied Wheatear. © *Howard King*

Table 3. Selected ornithological records from the British Embassy gardens May 12 to May 13.

Species	Comment
Pallid Swift *Apus pallidus*	Nesting on a nearby municipal building.
Eurasian Hoopoe *Upupa epops*	A pair in Sep 12; singletons in Mar and Apr 13
European Bee-eater *Merops apiaster*	Three remained for about 5 days Apr 13
Red-backed Shrike *Lanius collurio*	Several individuals, of both sexes, present May 12 and Apr–May 13. 3 individuals (2 female; 1 male) present concurrently in May 13
Isabelline Shrike *Lanius isabellinus*	One - one day - May 13
Lesser Grey Shrike *Lanius minor*	One - one day - Sep 12. Another remained for a week Apr–May 13
Masked Shrike *Lanius nubicus*	One male wintered from Sep 12 until Apr 13. Second individual - one day - May 13
Great Grey Shrike *Lanius excubitor*	One - one day - Sep 12
Grey Hypocolius *Hypocolius ampelinus*	One female - one day - Apr 13
Eastern Olivaceous Warbler *Iduna pallida*	Several visiting individuals May 12, Sep 12 and May 13
Blackcap *Sylvia atricapilla*	Several individuals, of both sexes, present May 12, Oct 12 and Apr/May 13
Common Whitethroat *Sylvia communis*	One - one day - Apr 13
Lesser Whitethroat *Sylvia curruca*	One - one day - Mar 13
Barred Warbler *Sylvia nisoria*	One - 2 days - May 12
Great Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus arundinaceus*	One remained for a week in Oct 12. One remained for a week in May 13
Common Chiffchaff *Phylloscopus collybita*	Singletons Oct 12, Nov 12 and Apr 13
Willow Warbler *Phyllocopus trochilus*	One - one day - Oct 12. Two - one day - Apr 13. One - one day - May 13
Common Redstart *Phoenicurus phoenicurus*	One male remained for 12 days in Apr 13
Rufous-tailed Scrub-robin *Cerrotrichas galactotes*	One - one day - Apr 13
Isabelline Wheatear *Oenanthe isabellina*	One - one day - Sep 12
Spotted Flycatcher *Muscicapa striata*	One - one day - Oct 12
Yellow Wagtail *Motacilla flava*	One - one day - May 12
White Wagtail *Motacilla alba*	One - one day - Nov 12
Tree Pipit *Anthus trivialis*	One remained for 4 days in Apr 13
Red-throated Pipit *Anthus cervinus*	One - one day - Sep 12
Ortolan Bunting *Emberiza hortulana*	One male and one female - one day - Apr 13

I have continued to log all my sightings on the *Worldbirds* database and further reports for these and other sites in Bahrain can be found at www.worldbirds.org. My heartfelt thanks are due to Howard King for the wonderful photos accompanying this article. A visit to his blog within the Bahrain Bird Report at www.hawar-islands.com would be well worth a few minutes of your time. Click on Bahrain Observations for the latest news and photographs.

Chris Moorey
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Plate 71. View from the foredeck. © *S Chapman*

Under sail from Bermuda to the Azores and Channel Isles

by Stephen Chapman

Captain Chapman has been a member of RNBWS since the 1960s when as an Apprentice he reported on regular voyages crossing the North Atlantic. Fifty years later he returns and reports on this voyage under sail from Bermuda to the UK.

It was with great anticipation that I sailed on STS *Tenacious* out of Hamilton, Bermuda on 18 April 2012. STS *Tenacious* is a wooden hulled three-masted barque[1] of 565gt and 47m on the waterline. The foc'sle is about 5 metres above the level of the sea. Under average conditions the ship sails at 6 knots. I describe her as *low and slow* which makes an ideal platform for watching seabirds in the open sea. However, the Atlantic low-mid 30s latitude in the early summer proved to be nearly deserted waters as far as birds were concerned. The reason for this was clear; birds were ashore at nest sites. This was well illustrated both in Bermuda and in the Azores.

In Bermuda on 14 April, at Spittal Pond and Portuguese Rock, a number of *Longtails* (White-tailed Tropicbirds *Phaethon lepturus*) were going in and out of nest sites under overhanging coral cliffs. This is their most northerly breeding site.

To leave Bermuda drilled in evacuation procedures, yard bracing and hands aloft, familiarised with fire and emergency alarms, ***Tenacious*** embarked a local pilot to seek a safe passage from Hamilton through Two Rocks passage and the Narrows - a deep water channel blasted through the coral reefs. Impatient to sail even before reaching the pilot station at St David's Head, we set staysails and topsails making best use of a moderate nor-westerly breeze, and as we did so I noted 15 White-tailed Tropicbirds along the cliffs. Pilot away, we set all sail to the topgallants and settled on a course of 075˚. Soon the last land for 14 days dropped away astern, and as we discovered, the last birds for more than a week!

[1] A tall ship squared rigged on two of the three masts

Looking for wind

Before leaving Hamilton I had checked the Atlantic synoptic weather chart from a coffee shop with wi-fi, and I knew this pleasurable sailing was not going to last. After just two days we came under the influence of an extensive and persistent high pressure system, the wind veered nor-easterly and stayed there day after day. This is where a test of patience came. We handed square sails and continued with staysails until it became clear that sailing on this course we would not reach our destination in the Azores but were making a course for the Canaries. We then handed all sails and motored under a blue sky, broken by cumulus on the horizon. Day watches were punctuated by an occasional sail when the wind went to the south east for a while. Then with the wind back in the east the watches were enlivened by sightings of Fin, Sei and Minke Whales, porpoises, turtles and Portuguese Men-of-War.

Looking for birds

It was a good day when during my deck watches or from the fo'c'sle when off watch I sighted a bird. On 20 April at 33 10N 59 50W and sea surface water temperature at 20deg C, a single Red-billed Tropicbird *Phaethon aethereus* circled the boat. The RNBWS Canon EOS 500D camera with its zoom lens proved its value through a series of quick fire shots to clinch the ID of this tropicbird. Motoring into continuing easterly winds it was six days before we sighted another bird - a single Cory's Shearwater quartering along a long line of cetaceans blowing at about 37N 44W. The shearwaters became more frequent next day at 37.5N 42W, very often in association with cetaceans. In fact on this passage we probably saw more whales than birds! I did not record any storm-petrels even though very often spouting whales or groups of dolphins are indicators of birds. The two go together.

Plate 72. Antarctic Prion. © *S Chapman* **Plate 73.** Tenacious at 35N 54W. © *Katy Strudwick*

Approaching the Azores

The RNBWS on-line database reveals that the waters around the Azores are very much unrecorded. What seabird records there are feature shearwaters *Procellariidae;* however Bannerman recorded Pomarine Skuas when passing through the islands on passage from Curaçao to England on 11–12 April 1962 (Bannerman, 1966).

Approaching the Azores we lost the wind and motored close to Flores on 30th April, the westernmost island of the group. 30 miles west I noted many Cory's Shearwaters *Calonectris diomedea* and a sole Pomarine Skua *Stercorarius pomarinus* in very fine adult plumage, sparring with an immature Yellow-legged Gull *Larus cachinnans* that had been following the ship. There were three sea terns *Sterna* sp 24 miles west of Flores on 30th April. Yellow-legged Gulls appeared to be at nest sites on Flores as we passed less than a mile offshore and headed overnight towards Faial and Pico. Now the shearwaters were common, flying in small groups and on the sea in rafts which dispersed as the bow got too close to them. They nest on Faial and I visited one site but was not able to get full access as the area was a declared nature reserve. Rafting of *Carrago,* as the locals call them, is a precursor to flying ashore to nest.

Ashore in the Azores

Horta was once the centre of a brutal whale hunting and processing industry, then the base for the transatlantic cable companies, and later an important port of call for seaplanes on transatlantic flights. Today Horta marina is a cosmopolitan centre for yachtsmen as a destination, or like us breaking a voyage to bunker, take water and store for the next leg. For sight-seeing there are the spectacular views of old volcanic craters and the desert-like debris from a unique subsea eruption in 1957 which created a new area of land, setting the Capelinhos lighthouse 1 km inland and covering it and adjacent villages in sand, ash and lava. The moonscape here is in stark contrast to the green small-scale cultivation and farming that absorb much of the rest of the island. As dawn broke Blackbirds *Turdus merula* were the first to break the night silence and then Robins *Erithacus rubecula*. Other small birds noted included Blackcap *Sylvia atricapilla*, Goldfinch *Carduelis carduelis* and Canary *Serinus canaria* in small flocks.

Plate 74. Portuguese Man of War. © *S Chapman*

Plate 75. Cory's Shearwater. © *S Chapman*

Passage to St Helier

We left Horta on the morning of 1 May and set sails. As we navigated the sound between the islands of Faial and Pico it was curious to see Cory's Shearwaters soaring against a back drop of green vegetation along the shore with hundreds over the waters of the sound.

We left the Azores on 3 May, the 18th day of our voyage, to find that sailing conditions had not changed. We picked up the watch pattern and motored between Pico and São Jorge and then passed by Terceira before altering course to the north east heading into both a long low rolling swell and a light breeze. Patience was tested again as we waited for a favourable wind but we had dolphins for company and passed small groups of shearwaters on the water. At 39 20N 25 08W we passed a Common Tern *Sterna hirundo* sitting on flotsam, but more birdless days followed as we motored on, until on 7 May at 42 39N 17 23W a Swallow *Hirundo rustica* joined us. That heralded a change; next day the wind went SSW force 5 and with all canvas set we logged 7 knots. A sub-adult gull and a small skua passed by. By the 9th we had real Bay of Biscay weather logging 10 knots at times in a southerly gale. On the 10th at 47 27N 8 09W sub adult Gannets *Sula bassana* started to appear and later that day a Fulmar and Manx Shearwater *Puffinus puffinus* and a Swallow appeared as we neared Ushant. There were more the following day as we passed 5 miles off the light.

We berthed in St Helier on the afternoon of 12th May. It had been a passage on which nearly all the bird life seen was concentrated close to land, and it was not for want of keeping a lookout in the open ocean that birds were not seen. Each day I spent watches on the fo'c'sle and was reduced to counting the surface drifting jellyfish-like Portuguese Man-of-War *Physalia physalis* and flotsam to keep focused. Seldom a 30 minute stretch went by without recording at least one piece of plastic debris.

Stephen Chapman
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References

Bannerman, D.A. 1966. *Birds of the Atlantic Islands* 3:222–3.

Plate 76. Julia Springett and co. © *C Peach*

Winter birds on the River Exe

by Chris Peach

A few members from Dartmouth started 2013 with a gentle bird watching cruise on the River Exe, to observe the numerous winter migrants that frequent this lovely estuary and where Royal Marines see the start of their training both on and off the water.

The intrepid group included a new RNBWS member, Julia Springett (ex RN), and her husband Robin, retired from the RAF and a past President of RAFOS. Both are highly respected birders and Julia is an experienced ringer, currently involved in a project to ring swallows in South Devon. It was good to meet up and discuss a forthcoming birding trip to Gambia as we shivered on Exmouth dock on a bright January morning. We soon embarked and the boat set out towards the sandbanks where we observed numerous Brent Geese. Brent Geese and Black-tailed Godwits are the estuary's most important species in conservation terms.

There then followed a slow passage upstream following the rising tide. Initially the visibility was good but fine drizzle set in later and that limited things a bit. However, all the usual resident and migrant birds were still to be seen easily from the observation deck.

A Slavonian Grebe was one of our early sightings, plus Red-breasted Mergansers and a splendid group of 13 Goldeneye that included two drakes. The first Avocets were then spotted, scything into the shallows at Powderham Castle where a solitary Spotted Redshank was seen on the return journey.

There was an absence of energetic green berets from the Commando Centre crawling across the river and this allowed the boat to approach the sandy Lympstone shoreline where the less obtrusive and altogether more dainty Greenshank was spotted. Both here and along the other sandier stretches we saw five Great Crested Grebes, some Sanderlings and several Bar-tailed Godwits.

We estimated that there were about five hundred Avocets and hundreds of Black-tailed Godwits and Dunlin, well scattered over the darker mud banks between Lympstone and Topsham and feeding on the dark rich organic mud. Interestingly we saw no Knot. As the boat approached Turf Lock a few Lapwings were seen on the mud alongside Curlews and a few Grey Plovers too. It was good to see a Grey Plover fly over the boat, so that we could appreciate its diagnostic black 'armpits'. A Grey Seal surfaced for brief periods to look at us, clearly showing its characteristic Roman-nose profile.

After seeing small numbers of Common Gulls in the outer estuary, we saw many more, resting and bathing as the boat approached Topsham. A rough count suggested over 300, which is a good total for the Exe Estuary. We were also afforded excellent views of a female Long-tailed Duck, which was alone at first but then joined Red-breasted Mergansers and flew with them.

The boat returned to Exmouth towards sunset and as it approached the jetty we noted the many birds now settled on the high water roosting area off Dawlish Warren. It was a good day to observe and consolidate our winter birding on the River Exe, the long tailed duck and a spotted redshank being the highlights.

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Plates 77–80. Avocet. © *S Copsey*; Grey Plover. © *S Copsey*; Long-tailed Ducks. © *S Copsey*; Spotted Redshank. © *M Cutts*

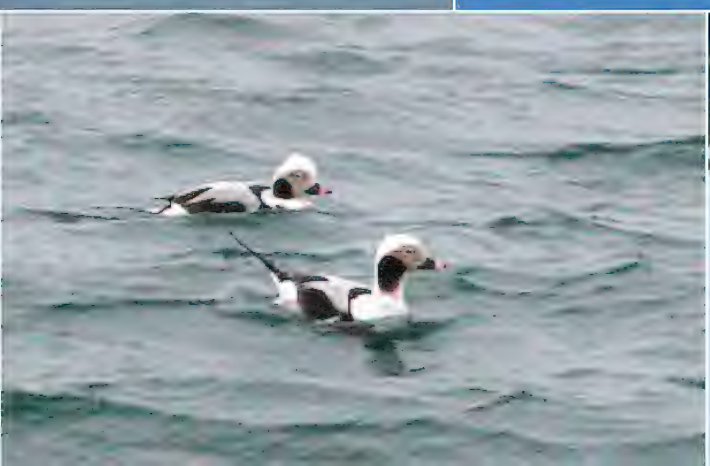


Plate 81. Portland weekend attendees. © *Steve Copsey*

RNBWS Portland Weekend, Fri 26–Sun 28 April 2013

by new member Lieutenant Steve Jones

I have served in the Royal Navy for over 25 years and have always endeavoured to combine global travel with my two passions, fishing and the natural world, especially birds. I had heard of the RNBWS but never got around to finding out any more until I came across an old copy of Sea Swallow (Vol. 51) in a second hand book shop in Falmouth (my home town).

From the details on the web site I was soon in touch with Mark Cutts, attended the AGM, joined the Society, and pitched up at Portland five months later, arriving at the Observatory to see a group looking intently at a small brown bird on a fence rail, a Grasshopper Warbler *Locustella naevia*, a new bird for me and a great start to the weekend.

Meanwhile, Mark in the Observatory had just netted a Garden Warbler *Sylvia borin* and even though I had seen this type of warbler before I had never seen one this close. After a quick unpack it was straight out and up the hill opposite the Observatory to watch the migrants as they made their way up the hill picking insects off the hedgerow plants: Wheatear *Oenanthe oenanthe,* Whitethroat *Sylvia communis*, Blackcap *Sylvia atricapilla* and Reed Warblers *Acrocephalus scirpaceus*. The walk around to the cliff top was not as productive as it had been in the morning for the other part of the group that had arrived earlier, but a Whimbrel *Numenius phaeopus* feeding in the long grass gave a good show. Time passes very quickly when you are enjoying yourself and it was soon time to make our way back to the Observatory to clean up in readiness to go for dinner at the Pulpit Inn. The food was good, the beer was fine and the banter and stories were excellent. Strange that all the other customers didn't want to listen to Steve Copsey's yarns and cleared off. Perhaps the residents of Portland Bill go to bed early.

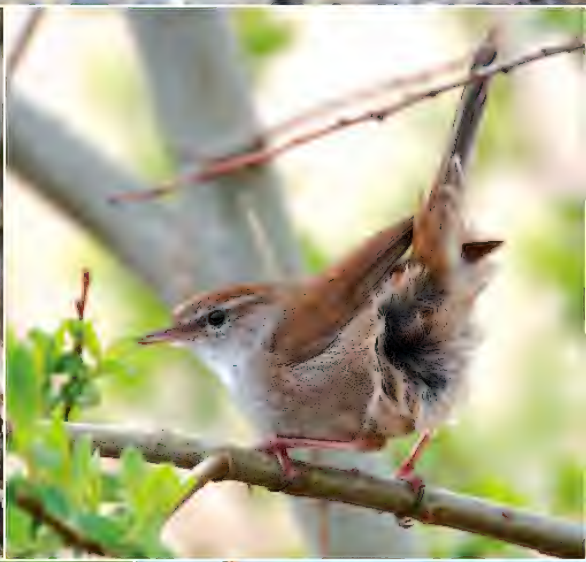
Saturday was an early start with the group up and ready to go at 0630. It had been a cool night and the wind had moved round to the north so we expected less migrants. Once again we walked up the hill opposite the Observatory to check the hedge lines and low growing shrubs for new arrivals. Once we reached the cliffs we were buffeted by high winds and we decided to make our way back down to the coastal path on the east side of the Observatory. Here we came across a Bonxie *Stercorarius skua* noted by its slow languid flight, and at this point the bacon sandwiches called so we all made our way back to the Observatory for a second breakfast.

Reports had been received that a Red-rumped Swallow *Cecropis daurica* had arrived at Lodmoor Nature Reserve with a group of hirundines so a quick plan was made to try and see this rare bird. Directions were given to those who did not know the local area and the RNBWS convoy set off. The drive through Weymouth was uneventful and soon all the cars were drawing up on the car park. Mark noted a large group of birdwatchers on the other side of the reserve, so it was back in to the cars and off to join them. The Red-rumped Swallow showed really well as it hawked small insects above the reed beds and was a new bird for most of us. Our next excitement was a very bold Cetti's Warbler *Cettia cetti* which perched on the edge of a bush close by, posed for a photograph, gave its very distinctive call and then flew back into the undergrowth. A slow walk around the reserve produced several new species for the weekend and my tally had increased to 65.

Next stop was to be Radipole reserve, and lunch, and the first bird to greet us was an Egyptian Goose *Alopochen aegyptiaca* that was quite happily eating bread with the Mallards *Anas platyrhynchos* in the small tree lined channel next to the entrance. However, the reserve was very quiet with only a Marsh Harrier *Circus aeruginosus* of any note. After leaving the NR my best bird of the weekend was spotted, this being the male Hooded Merganser *Lophodytes cucullatus* that was happily sharing bread with a flock of Tufted Ducks *Aythya fuligula* in the basin area. A quick stop at Ferrybridge on the way back to the Observatory produced a small flock of Ringed Plovers *Charadrius hiaticula* and a single Red Breasted Merganser *Mergus serrator*. Overall it had been a great day, and it was rounded off by a very entertaining flora and fauna quiz hosted by Steve Copsey.

Sunday started with another 0630 muster. After a cool overnight there was little movement in the trees or shrubs but a male Bullfinch *Pyrrhula pyrrhula*, resplendent with his bright dusky pink breast made a great sight before we moved off up the hill and across to the cliffs for a sea watching session. Wheatear, Whitethroat, and Reed Warblers were still making their way up the hillside on their way to their breeding grounds but the numbers were down on the previous days, and at the top we had striking views of a Whinchat *Saxicola rubetra*. The walk along the cliffs was more productive than the Friday as the wind had dropped and more birds were on the move. With Kittiwakes *Rissa tridactyla* wheeling around the cliffs with their distinctive cry, Guillemots *Uria aalge* and Razorbills *Alca torda* perched on the cliffs, we had a great hour of sea watching. On the way down the hill towards Portland Bill lighthouse a Redstart *Phoenicurus phoenicurus* was located at one of the naval radar stations and proved a little elusive as it looked for insects by the rail tracks and flitted around the maintenance shed. Another hour was spent watching the sea with a few more species seen, notably a pair of Red-throated Divers *Gavia stellata*.

Plates 82–93 (over-leaf). Top left to right: Redstart, Garden Warbler © *Matt Birchett*; Red-breasted Merganser © *Steve Copsey*; Kittiwake Juv © *Matt Birchett*. Middle Left to right: Whitethroat, Cetti's Warbler © *Matt Birchett*; Hooded Merganser © *Steve Copsey*; Egyptian Goose © Matt Birchett. Bottom left to right: Wheatear © *Matt Birchett*; Whinchat, Whinbrel, Ringed Plover © *Steve Copsey*.



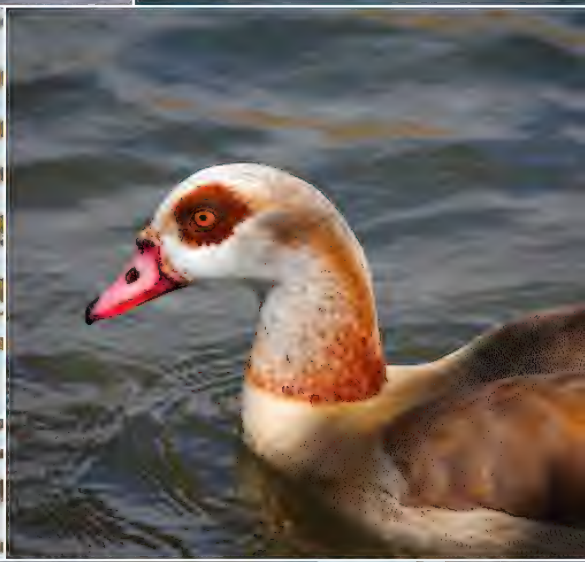


Plate 94. Little Owl. © *Steve Copsey*

As it was almost time to pack up and drive back to Plymouth we made our way slowly back from our sea watching to the 'Obs' for a final bacon sandwich, accompanied by a very tame Garden Warbler *Sylvia borin* that hopped along the wall collecting insects just in front of us for about 50 metres as we cut across towards the quarry. The resident Little Owl *Athene noctua* in the quarry stood sentinel looking for rodents from his usual crag and we had a great view through the scope. Back at the observatory, the netting team had netted and ringed a new species for the weekend in the shape of a Lesser Whitethroat *Sylvia curruca*. With the remaining birders gathered on the patio Mark took the bird out of his bag for all to see and what a smart little warbler it was. Upon opening his hand the bird flew to the top of one of the shrubs, had a little shake, looked around and flew off none the worse for its ordeal. This was a new bird for me so the weekend was rounded off perfectly, giving me a total of 85 species.

Many thanks to Mark and the team for organising a splendid weekend from start to finish. I ended up with 4 UK 'ticks' to add to my life list and was made very welcome by a great group of like-minded birdwatchers. I look forward to gazing at the sky, scanning a ploughed field and looking for that LBJ in the hedge row with you all again in the near future.

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Plate 95. King Penguin colony. © *George Lemann*

South Georgia seabird survival

by Alison Neil, Chief Executive,
the South Georgia Heritage Trust

There is just one songbird on the South Atlantic island of South Georgia. The tiny South Georgia pipit flits between rock and tussac grass, its tune distinct from the bellows of the elephant seals and high-pitched croaking of king penguins.

Pipits, like the prions, petrels and other small birds on South Georgia, nest on the ground or in shallow burrows. There are no trees or shrubs on the island, and when rats and mice jumped ship from visiting sealing vessels in the 19th century they had truly found an island paradise fit for a rodent. The endemic pipits in particular had nowhere to hide, and were soon banished to the remote offshore islands where the rats could not reach them.

In 2007 the Trustees of the tiny Scottish charity SGHT (the South Georgia Heritage Trust) with only one full-time staff member (the author of this article) took on the challenge of getting rid of the rodents from South Georgia. This was a decision which, if we had known the difficult road that lay ahead, might never have been taken!

Plates 96-98. Left: South Georgia Pipit. © *Steve Copsey;* **Middle:** Wandering Albatross. © *Ewan Edwards;* **Right:** Elephant Seals fight for territory. © *E. Shemilt*

It was not until March 2011 that the funds were raised - RNBWS was one of the contributors - and the team in place to drop the first rat bait on South Georgia. This trial phase covered only 12% of the infested area of the island, but was still the largest eradication ever undertaken worldwide at 12,500 hectares or 125 square km. Two years on, the areas cleared in 2011 are not only devoid of rats, but birds which in recent years have been unable to nest without their eggs and chicks being promptly eaten are successfully producing broods for the first time in living memory.

The next step came in February 2013, when the charity chartered the British Antarctic Survey vessel, the RRS *Ernest Shackleton* to deploy equipment to various remote locations around the island's coast, and to take 'Team Rat' back to South Georgia, with the aim of completing 60% of the remaining infested area - some 53,000 hectares.

Despite weeks of unremitting high winds and foggy conditions, members of the team persevered and achieved their target. They will next return to South Georgia in 2015 to complete the total eradication of rodents from the entire island - that is, if the remaining £2 million of a project costing £7.5million plus can be raised. This is a lot of money, but it is an investment which will see an estimated increase of 100 million in bird numbers on the island. Success will also save the island's endemic birds, threatened with extinction as glaciers recede and the rats march on into new areas of the island.

South Georgia, 8000 miles from the UK, has the greatest concentration of seabirds on the planet. To help return this island to its birds in perpetuity and to reverse the decline of the last 200 years, please sponsor a hectare of land to be cleared, at http:\www.sght.org/ Sponsor-a-hectare. Thank you.

Alison Neil
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An impromptu encounter with the South Georgia Rat Eradication Team

by Warrant Officer Tony Tindale

On Monday 11 Mar 13 I joined HMS *Protector* alongside in East Cove Military Port in the Falklands, and shortly after the ship headed for South Georgia for its final Work Period before returning to the UK. During operations around the island I managed to get ashore three times, including an overnight stay at Husvik Bay, and here I was delighted to come across two members of the Rat Eradication Team, engaged on a project that the RNBWS has helped to sponsor for the last couple of years.

Although South Georgia is a very large island the rats are unable to disperse across the glaciers. Consequently, their distribution is restricted to isolated pockets around the coast and this makes the eradication of the rat population possible. The project has been very successful in the areas that have already been treated and they are now considered to be rat free. South Georgia Pintails that previously failed to fledge any young because of rat predation are now fledging up to five ducklings. The endemic South Georgia Pipit has also benefited and has returned to re-colonise areas of its former range. But, and it is a significant but, the project has had serious adverse effects on some non-target species and earlier that day five corpses, three South Georgia Pintail, a Snowy Sheathbill and a Brown Skua, had been recovered from the local area. The South Georgia Pintail is one of the most badly affected species.

During my last spell ashore on South Georgia I had an opportunity to talk to other members of the Rat Eradication Team, this time in the comfort of the Research Station at Husvik, located adjacent to the abandoned whaling station. Earlier, I had seen for myself during a walk up the valley behind Husvik just how evenly the green coloured poison had been distributed. Dispensers slung beneath helicopters are used to spread the poison and the dosage is increased over coastal and vegetated areas. Very accurate printouts from positioning equipment onboard the helicopters enable any gaps in coverage to be determined and revisited.

Although the death of non-target species in the short-term is highly regrettable, the medium to long-term future for the species affected will be much brighter once the non-native rat has been eradicated from the island. South Georgia Pintail numbers should quickly recover in Husvik as they have in other areas of operations.

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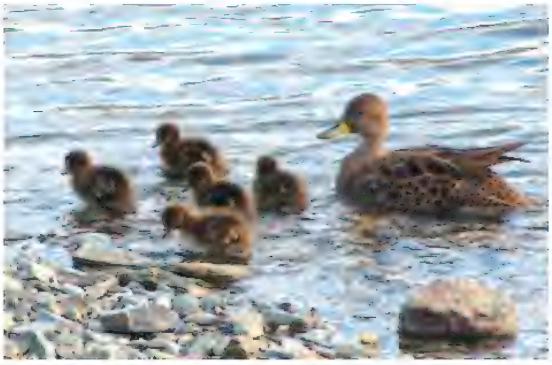

Plate 99. Pintail mother with ducklings in a cleared area. © *A Martin*

Plate 100. Looking north to Beauchene Island from the Citadel where Fairy prions were found nesting. © *Ian J. Strange*

Beauchêne Island, Fairy Prions and Royal Penguins

by Ian Strange

Beauchêne Island, discovered by the French navigator Gouin de Beauchêne in 1701, is the southernmost and most remote outlier of the Falkland Islands, situated some 80 km south of Porpoise Point, East Falkland. We know that the American sealer Edmund Fanning visited the island in 1817 and 1834, and Captain Fitzroy of HMS *Beagle* visited in 1834, (though it seems he did not land), and almost certainly the island was visited by sealers over the years, for on one of my own visits I came upon inscriptions cut into rocks recording visits made by sealers in 1836, 1904, and 1910, with the latest of these inscribed E.K. Schroder, 1919. Schroder was a local sealer and was the last to be officially recorded as having visited the island until some forty three years later when on 22 December 1962 HMS *Protector* landed a survey party. In the following year on the 2 December 1963 Protector made a further visit when a small party, which now included me, managed to land and spend the day ashore. This visit was to be the first by a naturalist, and the first of sixteen visits by me over a twenty five year span (nearly all with the help of the Royal Navy, for which many thanks).

Perhaps because of its remoteness, its inhospitable coastline and the demise of sealing, Beauchêne remained untouched and an island of some mystery. In the early 1960s I could find no living person who had visited the island except for a few mariners who had sighted the island en route to South Georgia or Antarctica, and there were no descriptions of fauna or flora. Stories passed down locally spoke of Beauchêne having a large colony of Black-browed Albatross and that it was an important breeding ground for Fur Seal, and it was this latter information that aroused my interest in Beauchêne and spurred my endeavours to get there. No local boats were prepared to risk the journey to this remote outlier where there was no anchorage, let alone take a crazy naturalist just to confirm the presence or not of Fur Seal.

The island is about 4 km long and 1 km wide at its widest point and is aligned with its long axis running from north to south. Much of it is covered with dense tussac grass growing on a plateau which makes up two thirds of its northern end, and the highest point is about 75 m above sea level. The central part of the island is a narrow waist, low lying and for the most part made up of shelving rock, rock debris and heavy clay patches devoid of vegetation. The southernmost section of Beauchêne consists of a mass of upstanding rock, which rises from the sea in spectacular cliffs. Made up of horizontal layers of rock, the southern point resembles a fortress which I was to name the Citadel, a name which has now been adopted officially.

Generally the coast of Beauchêne is rough and formidable, the north, eastern and southern points being composed of sheer cliffs rising to some 60 m from the sea, while the western side is made up of boulder, rocky debris and shelving rock formations. For this reason landing by boat is difficult and possible only in very calm conditions.

I noted from my research that the island in earlier times was known by sealers as the Beauchênes or Beauchêne Islands, and it is true that when approached from the east or west the high areas in the north and south make Beauchêne appear as two islands, the low central waist not being visible until one is quite near to land. This feature, which apparently deceived several early mariners, was first noted by Fitzroy in 1834, and I wonder if the island had actually been two formations 150 or more years ago. To reach the most southerly point and the Citadel one has to traverse huge slabs of loose rock which appear to have fallen from the north face of the Citadel into a narrow but deep gulch from which the sound of the sea issues. These slabs and debris now form a bridge over this gulch, and I suspect that before this rock-fall Beauchene was indeed two islands.

My main objective on the first visit was to establish if Fur Seal *Arctocephalus a. australis* were breeding on the island, but we didn't see single one. However, on later visits I discovered what had clearly been a major breeding site, evident from the typical scoring on highly polished rock made by the flippers and nails of these animals. What became of this breeding colony is not known, but in the course of carrying out an aerial photographic survey of Black-browed Albatross in 2010 a small number of what I believed to be Fur Seal were observed for the first time on this site. With evidence of large increases of Fur Seal at other Falkland breeding sites, I believe the Beauchêne Island site will again become an important breeding ground for this species.

The disappointment of finding the island devoid of Fur Seal was soon to be overcome by other discoveries. I knew from local information and confirmed by Protector during their visit in 1962 that a large colony of Black-browed Albatross *Thalassarche melanophris* existed, but I had not expected to see the vast colony that covered a huge area of the island's west coast, and the even greater numbers of Rockhopper Penguins

Eudyptes chrysocome which nested amongst these albatross. I estimated the colony to contain some 125,000 nests with almost double this number of Rockhopper Penguin, and having seen all the other major colonies of albatross in the islands, I believed it to be the largest in the Falklands. However, in 2010 using aerial photographic methodology I was able to confirm that this was an overestimate and 105,000 albatross nests was a more accurate figure, making it the second largest colony in the Falklands.

My visits to Beauchêne continued over the years, with time ashore ranging from a few days to several weeks, and in time the island revealed more of its secrets. During a visit in October 1965 I heard bird calls at night which I did not recognise, although I felt sure they came from some form of petrel. Finding the source at night in that rough terrain was something of a challenge, but the search eventually took me to the top of the Citadel where deep down amidst the rocky debris I discovered numbers of prion-like petrels on eggs. Later I was to find them breeding beneath a boulder beach on the island's west coast.

For some years there was much debate among taxonomists as to the identity of this prion, but eventually it was agreed that it was the Fairy Prion *Pachyptila tutur.* This is a species which normally breeds on Marion and Prince Edward Islands, on islands in the Bass Strait and on some islands off New Zealand, and why it should be found breeding so far away from its normal areas and in such large numbers on Beauchêne, but so far nowhere else in the Falklands, remains a mystery.

Bird calls were to lead me to another unusual discovery, this time fortunately during daylight hours. This new call was loud and deep, emanated from a large mixed colony of albatross and penguins, and led to the finding of a small breeding group of what I finally identified as Royal Penguins *Eudyptes chrysolophus schlegeli.* Some taxonomists argue that this species is just another form of the Macaroni Penguin *Eudyptes chrysolophus,* a view I find difficult to support. Had a taxonomist supporting this theory been with me when these birds were found, it would have been extremely difficult for him or her not to have come to the same conclusion as I had, that the Royal is so distinct from the Macaroni that it must at least be a sub species.

In what I concluded had to be a unique situation, here was a small group of Royal Penguins and only a few metres away numbers of Macaroni and Rockhoppers. I know of no other place where these three species can be seen nesting together, presenting the opportunity to make a detailed comparison, not only of their plumage and size but also of their calls. Anxious not to disturb the birds I did not try and measure them, relying on visual estimates of size only, but it was evident that the Royal Penguins were very much larger than the Macaroni, standing approximately 18 inches high. They also had a much larger egg, which I compared in size to the egg of a Gentoo Penguin *Pygoscelis papua.* It was notable too that the nesting pairs I discovered had only one egg, while the other two species of crested penguins found in the Falklands normally lay a clutch of two. This observation was supported the following season when three pairs of Royals were recorded with single chicks.

Plate 101. A Fairy Prion on Beauchene Island. Note the intense blue/grey of the feathers and black tail band. Although this bird is shown amongst tussac grass litter, no birds were found breeding within tussac grass stands. **Plate 102.** View looking south over main colony of Black-browed albatross. **Plate 103.** The main colony of Black-browed albatross and Rockhopper penguins. A view looking north from the centre of the island. Note the Gentoo penguins, which have a small breeding colony in this area. © *All Ian J. Strange*

Plate 104. Royal penguin pair at nest site on Beauchene Island; note the Rockhopper penguin nesting in background. © *Ian J. Strange*

There were other differences. I noticed that the size and shape of the Royal bill was quite distinct from that of the Macaroni, being about one third larger in both length and depth and coloured a deep reddish-brown. The colour of the gape and facial skin is also distinct, being a deep rose-red with bluish tints, while a grey-white bib extends from the throat line to the lower face and eye. The crest is similar to that of the Macaroni Penguin, but thicker and larger with some white feathers at the centre of the forehead.

Royal Penguins are normally confined to Macquarie Island, and finding them so far from their usual breeding area makes one wonder how this penguin and the Fairy Prion, both from the area of New Zealand, have come to breed on Beauchêne Island, but nowhere else in the Falkland archipelago? A third discovery, the finding of a wood boring weevil, identified as a New Zealand species, in a large balk of timber washed up on Beauchêne, raises an interesting question: is there a sea current from the Antipodes which flows up and hits this island and which is responsible for these introductions?

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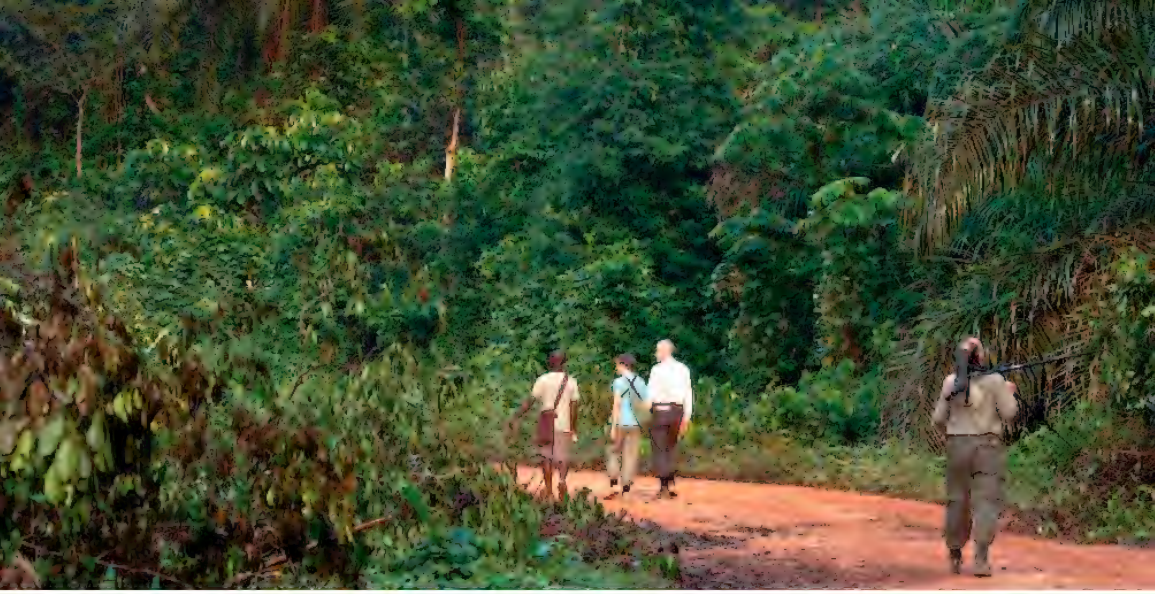

Plate 105. Birders. © *Martin Alabaster*

Bird-watching in Ghana, November 2011

by Rear Admiral Martin Alabaster

"How do you fancy a trip to the Highlands of Ethiopia when you finish with the Navy?" asked my friend and fellow member Nigel Hacking. He went on to explain that he had seen most of what was worth seeing in mainstream East Africa but Ethiopia looked good and would plug some gaps in his world list. Two other RNBWS members and Nigel's wife were swept into the group and a rough itinerary was planned. Then the catastrophic famine and subsequent refugee crisis hit the region and we all felt it an inappropriate time to visit. So we went to Ghana instead.

As readers will know, Ghana is in the area of West Africa whose fauna is defined by the rainforests of the Upper Guinea Basin, and with neighbours like Côte d'Ivoire, Togo, Benin and Nigeria is probably the easiest and safest country to visit in the region. So a further itinerary was planned, based upon two weeks covering the southern third of the country fairly thoroughly. We rejected the option of an excursion to the Savannah at Mole in the North - near the border with Burkina Faso - as needing too much time on the road. We accepted that we would dip out on the Martial Eagle in order to concentrate on the forest.

This was to be my first experience of a full-on birding trip of such length so it was with much excitement that I arrived at Heathrow for a 2300 take-off. The three of us (two were already there) slept a little as we flew straight down the Greenwich Meridian to arrive at Accra at about 0445. After some typically African scenes we successfully entered the country, found our bags and met our huge, friendly driver. As dawn broke, it was pleasantly warm and the day's bustle around the suburbs of the city was just getting going. I was pleased to be in Africa and confident that after a snooze and freshen up in our hotel, I would be ready for a gentle start to the birding.

However, my complacency was misplaced for after a 45 minute drive we were standing beside a main road and railway line with our binoculars and scopes trained across a set of reedy pools, the Sakamona Lagoon. We had linked up with the other two and quickly started our sightings with Black Heron, Green Heron and many other waders as well as Pied and Malachite Kingfishers. So a couple of ticks under the belt, the sun was up and it was getting hot. I was also getting hungry but our guide said he had a plan. So it was a mile inland from the pools to a scrubby area behind the 'Randy Lifeguard' Lido that yielded a Western Grey Plantain Eater and my first Double-toothed Barbet.

It was now about 1000 and something of a relief to get back in the air-conditioned microbus and set off for our next destination - and breakfast. The Accra roads were as crammed and chaotic as one might expect and by 1100 we were out to the East of the city and enjoying what our guide re-defined as an early lunch (in order to save more time for birding). So the tone of the trip was set and the day continued until we fell, knackered, into a small guesthouse well after dark. After all, we did want to go after the Scops Owl. After that, every day started with a 0430 or 0500 call-the-hands followed by a packed day at least until sunset.

We had arranged the trip ourselves with a local firm called Ashanti African Tours. The firm was run by Mark Williams, a friendly Brit whose enthusiasm for conservation had led him to stay in Ghana. All his staff were local, trained by Mark and pleased to have such skilled jobs. Without exception they were helpful, friendly and prepared to make great efforts to ensure the success of our trip. Our own team comprised Kawawa, the huge driver, Vincent, our bird guide and Charles who, enigmatically styled as the 'cultural guide', was more than willing to carry a tripod or two. All three were dedicated to our party of five and we shared a battered but practical Japanese microbus. As many readers will have already discovered, being in your own self-contained party makes the trip much more flexible and enjoyable.

Plates 106–112. (below): Pin-tailed Whydah; **(opposite):** Green (Striated) Heron. Black heron. Pied Kingfisher. Malachite Kingfisher. Long-tailed Nightjar. Olive-bellied Sunbird. © *All Martin Alabaster*

Plate 113. African Scops Owl. © *Martin Alabaster*

The plan for the tour had us spending a couple of days at the Kalapka Reserve, in the East, close to the Togo border, This is a reserve with lush grassland and mixed forest. On the way, we were distracted by a handsome Black-shouldered Kite viewing the road from a classic BOW (Bird on Wire) position. The reserve was excellent and it was exciting to see so many birds that were new to me. In a manner typical of many birding days, some beautiful birds, such as the Striped Kingfisher juggling a large cricket, were easy to see, well lit and quite confiding. Others - and from these two days the Forest Robin stands as an exemplar - demanded what seemed like hours of uncomfortable crouching and peering in return for a glimpse of a small dull shape in the middle of some dense vegetation. And others, such as the Western Banded Snake Eagle, simply flashed overhead.

The fourth day was dedicated by the others to the Atewa Range, while I lay around waiting for an infected cut on my leg to heal. Atewa is the only site in Ghana for the Blue-headed Bee-eater and I am pleased to say - honest - that their efforts in climbing the substantial hills were rewarded with a good sighting. The following day, the antibiotics bought locally for about £2 had done their work and I was back on my feet and able to enjoy the Bobiri Butterfly Reserve.

Day 6 was a scheduled highlight as we travelled to a small rainforest in the Ashanti region of the country. Here the people of a remote village have been brought into a conservation scheme to protect the habitat of the country's most famous bird in return for guiding fees from visiting birders. So after some miles on dirt tracks we found ourselves in the middle of a small, very rural village and the immediate focus of friendly interest from the local children. From there we set off on foot and after an hour's walking we were in position sitting quietly on a rock, just by the mouth of the nesting cave of a number of Yellow-headed Picathartes. Here we were to wait in silence for dusk to fall. Talking only in whispers, the rock became harder to sit on until, some two hours later, the forest was becoming distinctly gloomy. But then the Picathartes came. They were a pair, about turkey sized but with a strange kangaroo-like jumping habit. We had good views for perhaps 30 seconds and then they were gone into their nest cave. Photography was a challenge in the low light but at least a record was taken. We were very tired when we got back to the village in complete darkness but we still had that strange feeling that comes from the privilege of seeing something so unusual in nature.

Plates 114–119. (previous page): Rosy Bee-eater. © *Martin Alabaster;* Congo Serpent Eagle. © *Martin Alabaster;* Blue-headed Bee-eater. © *Nigel Hacking;* White-crested Hornbill. © *Martin Alabaster;* Yellow-headed Picathartes. © *Martin Alabaster;* Village Weaver. © *Martin Alabaster*

Still moving West, we were now heading for the Kakum National Park, On the way, a stop by a roadside pond gave us a fantastic view of a large Village Weaver community and as we crossed a major river, a pair of handsome Rock Pratincoles on an appropriate rock. Our evening stroll around the fringes of Kakum was a joy with White-throated and Rosy Bee-eaters, African Emerald Cuckoo and, after dark, the extraordinary experience of several Long-tailed Nightjars flying around us. The following day started with a dawn expedition to the tree-top walk. With the whole vertigo-inducing installation to ourselves, we spent several hours enjoying many birds from canopy level. Notably good views were of White-crested Hornbill, one of six hornbill species seen, several vultures and in the car park (always a top birding spot) the Pin-tailed Whydah which is not rare but very photogenic.

Two more days at Kakum were splendid with good views of African Pied Hornbill, Olive-bellied Sunbird and Yellow-billed Turaco amongst many others. After this we moved to the coast, almost on the border with the then rather turbulent Côte d'Ivoire and had a chance to walk on the beach and appreciate the rather rough Atlantic. Here, our tiny guest-house boasted a pair of Carmelite Sunbirds[1] in the front yard. Our final full day's birding was spent at Ankasa where a snatched photo of a Congo Serpent Eagle[2] turned out, unusually, to have caught the whole bird in the frame.

The following day we headed back towards Accra, pausing to check some lagoons where we were rewarded with a splendid Grey Kestrel and taking time to visit the citadel at Cape Coast and reflect on the country's history of slavery. We also called in at the office HQ of our tour company and met the small team who had set up our trip with such care. After a final night near Accra and a traffic induced panic about missing our flight, we were on our way home. It had been a fantastic trip that I would recommend to anyone, though the coolness, comfort and catering on British Airways seemed unbelievably luxurious compared with our 14 days in Ghana. However, I had seen 247 species of birds, most of them for the first time.

Martin Alabaster
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[1] Carmelite Sunbird - *Chalcomitra fuliginosa;* [2] Congo Serpent Eagle - *Dryotriorchis spectabilis*

PS. Photography - lessons learned
Many RNBWS members are very good and experienced photographers but some might be interested in a few lessons I learned during our Ghana trip.

A good camera and lens is heavy but must be ready at all times. It is much less tiring to carry it hooked onto your belt than around your neck or on your shoulder.

You don't want to change lenses in a steamy jungle or carry extra weight. So keep your long lens on the SLR for birds and carry a compact in your pocket for views, people and general shots.

The forest is gloomy and it is easier to correct a grainy image than a blurred one when you get home. So use a high ISO setting.

Certain opportunities are fleeting - such as the raptor flying overhead across a forest clearing - so set the custom functions in advance so that you can switch to, say, "Raptor" mode (Continuous AF, Exposure +2 stops, motor drive etc) instantly.

Plate 120. Gullick, Dobson, Casement. © *M. Casement*

A weekend with Tom Gullick

by David Dobson

"WORLD'S GREATEST BIRDWATCHER SETS A NEW RECORD. FORMER NAVAL OFFICER SPOTS 9000TH SPECIES IN INDONESIA."

The above 2012 headline caught my eye, especially the former naval officer bit. I found that Tom Gullick had been an RNBWS member in the very early days, tracked him down in Spain, and wrote to him. The upshot was that he invited Michael Casement and me to spend a long weekend with him in late January 2013. He picked us up from the early flight to Madrid, and it was clear from the outset that the focus of our waking moments throughout our four days was to be birding. On the way south to the first site Tom talked about his early life.

"My interest in birds started at my prep school, and when the school was evacuated early in the war to North Wales I had the perfect environment. I then joined the Navy, aged 13, in 1944, and once again found myself in the country, for the Royal Naval College had decamped from Dartmouth to Eaton Hall in Cheshire. There my interest in birds was nurtured by one of the masters, John Barlee, known to many I'm sure. When the college moved back to Dartmouth I produced a little booklet of Dartmouth birds - it should be somewhere in the RNBWS archives. Later, I joined RNBWS and BOU - Peter Scott was one of my proposers."

"After leaving the Navy at the age of 28 I set up a little travel business. That business in ten years became the first and biggest package tour business in the world - Clarksons. However, the holding company that owned us then decided on a path which I disagreed with, so I left - and not long after they went bust."

"By this time I had many contacts in Spain - Clarksons had filled 30,000 beds a night in Spain at its height - and I had done a good deal of shooting there, so I decided to move to the Mancha, an undeveloped region of central Spain, and set up a business running partridge shooting. This proved to be very successful, and I have now done it for the past forty years, together with birding tours and of course, going around the world in pursuit of my aim of seeing 9000 species - 90% of the known world total. Basically, I run birding holidays in the spring, in Morocco, here in the Mancha, and in the Pyrenees; in the autumn I run the partridge shoots (only wild birds, and I make sure no overshooting takes place), and in the summer I go off on my bird-hunting travels."

Our first birding quest was in search of Great Bustards; flat country, large open fields; no hedges and good visibility. We had a long wait, but there were plenty of other birds to see: Skylarks, Calandra Larks, Pin-tailed Sandgrouse, the occasional Buzzard, and two Little Owls in the ruins of an old hut. Eventually we spotted two Great Bustards on the ground, and later, as we moved away towards our next stop we encountered three flocks of about thirty each, in flight.

We next moved to a wetland site, with plenty of White Storks, Flamingos, gulls and ducks, but few waders. Also present were the attendant Marsh Harriers and a single Hen Harrier. We stayed an hour, munched our sandwiches, and moved on, to seek a more elusive bird, the Little Bustard. We were fortunate to find one, and while watching this lovely bird we became aware of a small group Golden Plover and a single Black-shouldered Kite.

Our last quest of day one was to see a pair of Eagle Owls. Their nest was in a cleft in a cliff face, and we spent a very cold hour scanning the cliff as night approached, but it was a case of heard but not seen, and we made our way home, with Michael Casement ordered to stand with head out of the vehicle roof on lookout duty for perching birds. He saw none, and took some time to thaw out.

Next day we were up early, and Tom briefed us as we moved out in the darkness.
"Today I hope we'll see three species of Eagle: Spanish Imperial, Golden, and Bonelli's. The Imperial Eagle is a bird of the dehesa, between the plain and the sierra, and we have in the Mancha the biggest population in Spain, protected and doing well. The other two, the Golden Eagle and Bonelli's, breed much higher up, in the sierra. We should also see Griffon and Black Vultures there, plus many smaller birds."

The day remained cold as we made our way gradually upwards. What became very evident was that our host, after forty years of bird tours, knew the ground thoroughly, and knew just what birds to expect. I was particularly taken with the Azure-winged Magpie. This was always thought to be a bird brought by sailors from the East, but recent examination of some very old bones in Gibraltar (performed, as it happens, by a friend of Michael Casement) revealed that it is an Iberian species in its own right, and should now be called the Iberian Magpie.

Plates 121–123. (opposite): Griffon Vultures. © *M. Alabaster*

Plates 124–129. (previous spread, left page): Black-shouldered Kite. © *M. Alabaster;* Azure-winged Magpie. © *M. Alabaster;* Purple Gallinule. © *A. Tindale;* (previous spread, right page): Great Bustards. © *M. Alabaster;* Common Cranes. © *M. Alabaster;* White Storks. © *M. Casement*

We had a cold but successful day, with nearly sixty species seen, including fine views of Imperial and Golden Eagles. However, we didn't see Bonelli's Eagle, and so it was that by dawn next day, some two hours from home, we were perched on a viewpoint high above a torrent, looking across to enormous crags. Tom briefed us again.

"Bonelli's hunt in pairs across the contours. The leading bird stays high, draws attention to the quarry, and the lower bird comes in low for the kill."

Griffon Vultures were the first to appear, followed by a solitary Golden eagle, and then after half an hour two birds appeared and moved exactly as we had been briefed, the first one high, the other behind and low. We watched this pair of Bonelli's Eagles for half an hour before descending to the plain to another wetland site. It was good to see a Whiskered Tern among the gulls; Ruff, Greenshank and a pair of Purple Gallinules too, but I remembered Tom describing the site as the 'Moorhen World Headquarters' and there were hundreds of these little birds, not only on the lake margins but scattered all over the surrounding fields.

We still hadn't seen our Eagle Owls, so we tried another site, and another dusk vigil in the freezing wind. More low hoots, and a bit of excitement as a Golden Eagle passed overhead - but no sighting of the owls.

Top priority for our final day was to see Cranes, reported on the plains about halfway on the way back to Madrid, and with the help of a young nature reserve ranger called Pedro we found them, a group of six, looking magnificent in the sun. We also came across a small flock of Great Bustards as we moved towards our last wetland site and thence to the airport.

It was quite a whirlwind weekend, but a hugely satisfying one. We drove over a thousand miles (that is to say, our forbearing host drove over a thousand miles) and we saw a hundred species, which was pretty good for midwinter, with few migrant waders and warblers yet to arrive.

Our final achievement was to welcome back Tom Gullick as a member of RNBWS.

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Plate 130. Black-naped Tern, parents feeding a juvenile. © *Peter & Michelle Wong*

Seabirds of Hong Kong - an update

by Geoff Welch, RNBWS rep. for Hong Kong

It is now three years since my original article 'Seabirds of Hong Kong' was published in *Sea Swallow 59* (2010), and the aim of this article is to update readers on recent news as well as giving me an opportunity to publish some new photos, this time in colour.

My study of bird migration on the island of Po Toi, Hong Kong, has continued and now covers the years 2006–2013. Although the study is focused on land birds, Po Toi is the best location in Hong Kong to watch for seabirds and I do this on a daily basis, early morning and late evening, when staying on the Island. This report also includes records drawn from the Hong Kong Bird Watching Society (HKBWS) Website and Annual Reports, listed in the Reference section.

As described in the original article, spring is the main season for seabirds in Hong Kong, from late February to early June, when seabirds wintering in south China waters and further south pass through Hong Kong heading to their breeding grounds in eastern and northern China, Russia, Korea and Japan. Summers in Hong Kong are hot and wet; three species of tern breed here and are the main summer seabird attraction. Autumn, from late August to end September, sees a few seabird species on return migration but is also the main typhoon season when any seabird from the area can be storm-driven into Hong Kong waters. Winter features gulls, with Ancient Murrelet and the occasional diver or cormorant, all brought south by a cold current from the Sea of Japan and wintering in south China waters. Added to these seasonal species are the wanderers, mostly juvenile Frigatebirds and Boobies which can appear at any time during the year.

This article will deal with recent happenings in each season in turn.

Winter Visitors/ Early Spring Migrants

As mentioned in the original article, the South China Sea is usually warm, without a mix of warm and cold currents to cause upwelling of nutrients and create food for seabirds. The exception is winter, when a current of cold water originating in the Sea of Japan passes along the northern coastline of the South China Sea almost reaching Hainan. This cold water current brings the February sea temperature in the Hong Kong area down to 16 deg C, similar to that of waters in southern Japan 700 miles further north, and allows wintering seabirds from Japan to move down the China coast into Hong Kong waters and further west.

Plate 131. Black-legged Kittiwake and Arctic Skua, both scarce but regular April passage migrants. © *Liu Jianzhong*

Gulls are the common winter visitors, Heuglin's Gull, *Larus heuglini taimyrensis,* and Black-tailed Gull, *Larus crassirostris,* both seen in highest numbers as they migrate northeast in early spring. Whilst Heuglin's Gull is still the commonest gull species with up to 600 seen in total on early spring migration, Black-tailed Gull has been recorded in increasing numbers and in 2013 their numbers exceeded that of the larger Heuglin's Gull.

Black-legged Kittiwake *Rissa tridactyla ssp pollicaris* is another regular winter visitor from the Sea of Japan, seen on spring migration in small numbers each year. Red-throated Diver, *Gavia stellata,* and Japanese Cormorant *Phalacrocorax capillatus* have again been recorded over the past three years and both species are probably annual in Hong Kong waters in winter. Ancient Murrelet *Synthliboramphus antiquus* certainly are; small flocks can be seen regularly passing northeast off Po Toi Island in March.

In my original article I mentioned a Japanese Murrelet *Synthliboramphus wumizusume* found from an HKBWS pelagic in spring 2007. This was a great surprise at the time, and thought to be a one-off never to be repeated. Not so; another was seen from a pelagic in 2012. Both birds had wing feather degradation thought by the experts to be due to bacterial infection. Whatever the origin, they had both lost the ability to fly and had probably drifted in the current into Hong Kong waters, a final journey.

Plate 132. Japanese Murrelet, the second Hong Kong record. © *Kitty Koo*

Spring Migrants

The regular spring migration of Short-tailed Shearwater *Puffinus tenuirostris* through Hong Kong continues to be recorded every year following its discovery in 2006. These birds are migrating from their breeding grounds in southern Australia to their wintering grounds around Japan, and are very consistent in their passage through our waters, from 20 April to 3 June with a peak in numbers around 10 May. The species has also now been recorded around these dates in the Straits of Malacca and off Singapore, probably birds which have found themselves in the 'wrong' ocean (the Indian) and are attempting a return to the Pacific. So the Hong Kong migrants may have their origin from the west rather than the east, as I suggested in my first article.

Red-necked Phalarope *Phalaropus lobatus* are seen daily in small numbers throughout April but a passage of 2,490 in two hours on 5 April 2012 was an impressive sight and a Hong Kong record count.

Skuas and terns also pass through Hong Kong waters in April. Of the terns, the most interesting for visitors is the Aleutian Tern *Onychoprion aleuticus.* Hong Kong is the only location away from their breeding grounds in the Bering Strait area where they have been seen regularly. This lack of knowledge of wintering grounds has led the University of Alaska and the US Wildlife Service to embark on a program of fitting geolocators to Aleutian Terns breeding in Alaska. Results so far indicate the Alaskan birds winter in Indonesia. The Hong Kong birds probably originate from the Siberian side of the breeding grounds, and the fact that they are seen in Hong Kong in both spring and autumn may indicate wintering grounds further west, perhaps off Vietnam.

The Greater Crested Tern *Thalasseus bergii* breeds much closer to Hong Kong, about 300 miles as the tern flies, in the east China province of Fujian. They are an almost daily occurrence off Po Toi throughout April and Hong Kong record counts have been seen in the past few years. They breed together with the world's rarest tern, the Critically Endangered Chinese Crested Tern *Thalasseus bernsteini.* This species was rediscovered in 2000 and has a world population of about 50 individuals all breeding in east China. It is our hope that one day this species will also be seen in Hong Kong.

Plate 133. Greater Crested Tern, a regular spring passage migrant. © *Peter & Michelle Wong*

Plates 134–135. (left): Short-tailed Shearwater - a recently discovered spring passage migrant from breeding grounds in southern Australia. © *Yu Yat Tung*; **(right):** Red-necked Phalarope on migration, a regular spring and autumn passage migrant. © *Geoff Welch*

Summer breeders

Three species of tern breed among the 236 islands which make up coastal Hong Kong, Bridled *Onychoprion anaethetus,*Roseate *Sterna dougallii* and Black-naped Tern *Sterna sumatrana*. These are all at the extreme north of their breeding range but recent careful searches of all the available islands in south and east Hong Kong in summer have shown their numbers to be much higher than previously thought, around 700 each for Bridled and Black-naped and 300 for Roseate.

Autumn migrants/typhoons/ wanderers and rarities

As mentioned before, Aleutian Terns are one of only three species of seabird to be seen regularly in early autumn, the others being Red-necked Phalarope and Common Tern *Sterna hirundo.* Our belief is that all these species winter further west than others, in Vietnam rather than Indonesian waters. A record count of 430 Aleutian Terns was seen passing southwest off Po Toi on 9 September 2010, following the passage of a tropical storm through the Straits of Taiwan.

Typhoons and tropical storms are frequent in the South China Sea in late summer and autumn, and can bring seabirds into Hong Kong waters. And not just the waters. A Hong Kong first record of Bulwer's Petrel occurred when a moribund bird was picked up from a playground in Kowloon, mainland Hong Kong, following a tropical storm on 24 June 2011. According to reports from east coast USA, seabirds frequently mistake playgrounds and car parks for areas of water when driven inland by storms and this bird must have done so. Unfortunately, it died in care a few days later.

Late May 2012 saw an unusual period of strong easterly winds, resulting in two exceptional records, a Swinhoe's Storm Petrel and another Bulwer's Petrel. Both species breed in eastern China so their presence in Hong Kong waters is not unexpected, but it takes special weather conditions for them to appear. Seawatching in high winds takes nerve but often results in good returns.

Conclusion

As mentioned in my first article, Hong Kong is not a primary seabird location but, in the right place and at the right time of year, it can be quite productive. HKBWS runs regular pelagic day trips in the spring seabird season and also in summer to visit tern breeding sites; visitors to Hong Kong at these times are welcome to join us. Anyone who wishes to have further information or is interested in visiting Hong Kong to see birds, seabirds or other, is welcome to contact me.

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Seabird observations in the Fiji area

by Captain Neil Cheshire MN

I made voyages to the Fiji area aboard the CSIRO research vessel 'Southern Surveyor' (66m) from 4 May to 5 June 2008 and 12 May to 4 June 2012. Both voyages were engaged in marine geoscience, surveying bathymetry, petrology and hydrothermal activity at the edge of the Pacific plate. Our operation consisted of steaming at 8 knots in grid patterns using high resolution multibeam sonar to identify interesting areas. These were then dredged (in depths to 3500 metres) for rock samples, and instrumentation to monitor water chemistry and hydrothermal activity was deployed to the sea floor.

In 2008 we entered Fijian waters from the south west and passed south of the main islands of Viti Levu and Vanua Levu. Our main area of operation to the east and north east of Fiji was within the EEZs (Exclusive Economic Zones) of Fiji, Tonga and the French overseas territory of Wallis and Futuna. A diversion to Apia, Western Samoa was made to land a sick crew member and the voyage ended in Suva, Fiji. In 2012 we sailed from Lautoka, Fiji with our main areas of operation to the north and northeast of Fiji, within the EEZs of Fiji and Wallis and Futuna. Weather during both voyages was good with mostly light winds and occasional episodes of south-east winds up to 25 knots. Ten-minute 360° counts of all identifiable seabirds were made on an opportunity basis, 91 in 2008 and 144 in 2012.

Species List

A reporting rate is given, and is the % of ten minute counts in which each species was recorded. When positions are given, the EEZ is indicated: (F) Fiji, (T)Tonga, (WF) Wallis and Futuna, (WS) Western Samoa.

Tahiti Petrel *Pseudobulweria rostrata* (4.2%). Frequently recorded in Fijian waters and may breed on Taveuni, Fiji (Jenkins 1986, Shirihai *et al.* 2009). I saw eleven single birds, nine in Fijian waters and two near Futuna.

Fiji Petrel *Pseudobulweria macgillivrayi*. Despite keeping a good lookout I did not see this rare petrel which has an estimated population of less than 50 pairs breeding on Gau Island, Fiji (Shirihai *et al.* 2009). We were close to Gau on three occasions and spent several hours working in the area, but to my disappointment always at night.

Kermadec Petrel *Pterodroma neglecta* (1.3%). I had two records of intermediate morph birds with brown upperparts showing prominent white primary shafts, white cheeks and chin, dark upper breast band, white breast and belly and brown undertail coverts. The species has a short-tailed appearance. One at 15°14'S 179°02'W(F) and another or the same bird nearby at 15°09'S 179°09'W(F) on 27 May '12. I saw a dark morph bird with prominent white primary shafts at 16°54'S 174°53'E(F) on 4 June '12. Kermadec Petrels breed on the Kermadec Group, Lord Howe Island and on Ata, Tonga, and they were seen off southern Fiji in 2005,2008 and 2009 (Shirihai *et al.* 2009).

Herald Petrel *Pterodroma heraldica* (1.3%). I recorded three pale morph birds, one at 17°29'S 176°46'W(F) on 4 June '08, one at 14°41'S 178°07'W(WF) on 20 May '12 and one at 14°56'S 177°17'W(WF) on 22 May '12. They were similar to Kermadec Petrels but lacked the white primary shafts and had a longer tailed appearance.

Mottled Petrel *Pterodroma inexpectata* (1.3%). This trans-equatorial migrant breeds during the austral summer on islands off southern New Zealand. I observed three of these distinctive birds on passage in Wallis and Futuna waters, all flying north on 20 May '12, at 14°40'S 178°06'W, 14°41'S 178°04'W and 14°45'S 177°54'W.

White-necked Petrel *Pterodroma cervicalis* (0.4%). There are several previous records from the Fiji area, mainly in May and June, of

birds migrating from the Kermadec Is area, where 50,000 pairs breed, to the central Pacific (Jenkins 1986). I saw one at 17°22'S 176°38'W(F) on 4 June '08. The Vanuatu Petrel *Pterodroma occulta* previously treated as a subspecies of White-necked Petrel may occur in the area and can probably only be distinguished at sea using good quality digital images; however there is little difference in some birds.

Black-winged Petrel *Pterodroma nigripennis* (4.2%). The species breeds on many islands in the SW Pacific including Tonga but has not been found breeding in Fiji. It is mostly absent from the SW Pacific between June and October when it migrates to the north central Pacific. I saw single birds at 15°25'S 175°45'W and 15° 25'S 175°39'W on 16 May '08 near the outlying Tongan island of Nuia Fo'ou and another at 15°32'S 177°11'W(T) on 21 May '08. One bird came aboard in heavy rain at 17°43'S 176°38'W(F) on 4 June '08 (see Sea Swallow 57:7) and was released the next day. Single birds were seen at 14°44'S 177°56'W(WF) and 14°49'S 177°55'W(WF) on 20 May '12, at 14°18'S 177° 12'W(WF) and 14°17'S 177°14'W (WF) on 21 May '12, two at 15°13'S 178°58'W(F) on 27 May '12 and one at 15° 03'S 179°17'W(F) on 28 May '12. These observations probably include Tongan breeding birds and those from further south on passage to the north Pacific.

Gould's Petrel *Pterodroma leucoptera* (1.3%). In the SW Pacific they breed on New Caledonia and in small numbers at Cabbage Tree Island NSW. There are previous records from the Fiji area (Jenkins 1986, Shirihai *et al.* 2009). I saw four Gould's Petrel's during the 2012 voyage with two at 15°43'S 178°33'E(F) on 16 May, one at 15°28'S 178°45'E(F) on 17 May and one at 15°00'S 177°17'W(WF) on 22 May. In flight they are distinguished from the similar pale morph Collared Petrel by the dark hood extending unbroken at 45° from the eye to the sides of the breast, and on the underwing by more extensive pale bases to the primaries. In the similar Collared Petrel the dark hood extends horizontally below the eye with an abrupt drop to the sides of the breast. (Onley and Scofield 2007, Mike Carter in litt). These features are shown in my photograph of 16 May '12.

Plate 137. Gould's Petrel 15.43'S 178.33'E Fiji waters, 16 May. © *Neil Cheshire*

Plate 136. Gould's Petrel on board off New Caledonia 29 May'08. © *Neil Cheshire*

Collared Petrel *Pterodroma brevipes* (4.2%). This is the most frequently recorded petrel in the Fiji area, breeding on Gau, Ovalau, Kadavu, Taveuni and other islands (Watling 2004). It is polymorphic, with the pale morph having a completely white ventral body, the intermediate morph a variable dark breast band and greyish markings and the dark morph completely dark grey below except for a pale throat. In Fiji waters I recorded single pale morph birds at 20°13'S 175°48'E on 4 May '08, at 17°24'S 179°57'E on 6 May '08 and at 16°54'S 174°53'E on 4 June '12. In the area around the Tongan island of Nuia Fo'ou I recorded a dark morph bird at 15°14'S 176°43W on 14 May '08, two intermediate birds at 15°28'S 175°29'W and a dark and pale bird at 15°28'S 176°11'W on 19 May '08. Elsewhere I saw single pale morph birds at 14°56'S 177°15'W(WF), 15°02'S 177°51'W(WF), 14°55'S 177°53'E(WF), 13°57'S 178°54'W(WF).

Wedge-tailed Shearwater *Ardenna pacifica* (15.3%). The most widely recorded procellariiforme. Jenkins (1979) demonstrated that most of the Wedge-tail population leaves the Fiji area by the end of May and suggested they migrate to the eastern tropical Pacific. My observations confirmed this as 92% of my sightings were before the third week of May, mostly of single birds, and none were seen in early June. The only flock sighted was of 15 birds at 13°55'S 172°17'W(WS) off Savaii on 17 May'08.

Buller's Shearwater *Ardenna bulleri* (4.2%). A trans-equatorial migrant breeding on Poor Knights Islands off northern New Zealand in the southern summer. The Fiji area appears to be at the western edge of their migration route with only five previously documented records.

With one exception all my ten records of birds flying north were east of the main Fijian Islands. I saw single birds at; 15°02'S 176°14'W(T) on 11 May '08, 15°04'S 173°33'W(T) on 18 May '08, 16°02'S 177°34'W(F) on 23 May '08, 16°18'S 177°58'W(F) + 16°20'S 178° 04'W(F) on 25 May '08, 18°12'S 178°32'E(F) on 27 May '08, 14°44' 178°15'W(WF) + 14°41'S 178° 04'W(WF) on 20 May '12, 14°24'S 177°16'W(WF) on 21 May '12 and 14°56'S 177° 15'W(WF) on 22 May '12.

Sooty Shearwater *Ardenna grisea* (12.8%). A transequatorial migrant with most of the population breeding around New Zealand, with a few in SE Australia. In 2008 when the ship was operating to the east of Fiji, I recorded northward migrating Sooty Shearwaters most days between the 13 and 28 May (WS,T,F). The peak was on 18 May at 15°04'S 173°33'W(T) when I saw Sooties heading north all day in small groups at the rate of 40–60 birds per hour. In 2012 the ship was north of the main Fijian islands until 20 May when we moved east to 14°45' 178°12'W(WF) where I recorded small numbers moving north each day until 23 May, 15°16'S 177° 23'W(WF), before moving back west to the 'shadow' of the main islands. The Fiji area appears to be at the western edge of the northerly migration route.

Newell's Shearwater *Puffinus newelli* (1.3%). Watling (2004) mentions one near Samoa (Sept 1977) and another on American Samoa (Jan 1993). The September 1977 sighting was by P and K Meeth (1983) who wrote "After departure from Apia proceeding to Suva on 19 Sept 77 we observed 5 Manx Shearwater species with the charcteristics of *P.p.newelli*. The two white spots on the back near the flanks were conspicuous". I had three sightings of birds I consider to be this species, one at 14°14'S 178°54'W(WF) on 26 May '12, one at 15°09'S 179°02'E(F) and two at 15°10'S 178°50'E(F) on 29 May '12 (see photograph). These are the first documented records for Fiji and Wallis Futuna. On all occasions medium small black and white shearwaters flying low over the water with a fast wingbeat and some glides crossed in front of the ship. Upperparts black with white patches extending to sides of rump. One bird showed white tips to greater

Plate 138. Newell's Shearwater 15.10'S 178.50'E Fijian waters. *© Neil Cheshire*

coverts. Black of face extended below eye and was clean cut with a small white crescent behind ear. Sides of neck dark forming a partial collar. Underparts white with white centre to dark undertail. Underwing white with dark margins broader on trailing edge. Inner white underwing coverts had a small blackish ulnar bar. From one photograph the legs and feet appeared pink with black edges. Newell's breeds on Hawaii from May to September and disperses southwards to equatorial waters.

Tropical (Baillon's) Shearwater *Puffinus bailloni* (3.0%). Small black and white shearwaters with all dark upperparts and white underparts and underwings with broad dark margins were seen, but not close to the vessel. These were thought to be Tropical Shearwaters of which the sub species *dichrous* breeds widely in the SW Pacific. One at 15°21'S 176°50'W(T) on 16 May '08, two at 15°28'S 176°05'W(T) and one at 15°28'S 176°11'W(T) on 19 May '08, single birds at 14°41'S 178° 04'W(WF) on 20 May '12, at 15°00'S 177°17'W(WF) on 22 May '12, at 14°53'S 177° 59'W(WF) on 24 May '12 and at 15°09'S 179°09'W(F) on 27 May '12.

Yellow-billed (White-tailed) Tropicbird *Phaethon lepturus* (3.4%). I had eight records of single birds (F,T,WF)

Masked Booby *Sula dactylatra* (0.4%). The least common booby in the Fiji area. I recorded a single immature at 16°44'S 174°02'E(F) on 3 June '12.

Red-footed Booby *Sula sula* (20.8%). The most frequently seen species (F,WF,T), usually in small groups and often perched on floating logs, palms etc. The species is polymorphic, and I saw the following morphs: white-tailed white, white-tailed brown with white belly and white tailed brown with brown belly. Adults in all morphs had pale blue bills with a pink base to the lower mandible and immatures in various stages of plumage had pale pink bills with a dark tip.

Brown Booby *Sula leucogaster* (2.1%). The species favours coastal waters and I had just five records in Fijian and Tongan waters.

Lesser Frigatebird *Fregata ariel* (2.1%). I saw a few pairs attending groups of Red-footed Boobies with which they engaged in exciting aerial chases to steal the boobies' catches.

South Polar Skua *Stercorarius maccormicki* (0.4%). A migrant to northern oceans during the southern winter. I saw a large skua with a pale grey-brown head and body that contrasted with black-brown wings heading NW at 14°46'S 176°03'W(T) on 12 May '08 and identified it as this species.

Black-naped Tern *Sterna sumatrana* (0.4%). I observed a flock of 50+ over the reef at 18°08'S 178°24'E(F) on 27 May '08 when the ship was entering Suva harbour.

Sooty Tern *Onychoprion fuscatus* (8.1%). Most of my sightings were of small flocks with a maximum of 20 at 17°13'S 176°43'W(F) on 30 May '08.

Common Noddy *Anous stolidus* (1.7%). I saw singles and pairs on four occasions (F, WF,WS), all initially at rest on floating debris.

Black Noddy *Anous minutus* (1.3%). One on board at 15°53'S 177°22'W(T) on 23 May '08. I recorded one at 16°03'S 177°39'W(F) on 24 May '08 and a flock of 300+ near the reef entrance to Suva harbour on 27 May '08.

White Tern *Gygis alba* (2.1%). All my observations were of single birds apart from a flock of eight at 15°25'S 175°45'W near the Tongan island of Nuia Fo'ou on 16 May '08.

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Oceanic birds of South India - an update

by Praveen J, RNBWS rep for India

India has a long history of ornithological endeavours, starting from the times of Sykes, Hodgson and Jerdon in middle of the 19th Century through the age of Hume, Oates, Blanford, Whistler and Ticehurst into the era of Salim Ali, Koelz, Ripley and Abdulali, who finally heralded the age of field ornithology in the 1970s (Shyamal 2007). However, one of the least explored eco-systems in the country remains the oceans, and the true status of several pelagic species is still unknown. What little has been documented has been largely based on coastal records of birds blown ashore by monsoon winds, observations during a few ornithological expeditions to the islands (Mathew and Ambedkar 1964; Mohan 1989; Daniels 1992; Pande *et al.* 2007) and observations made from ships at sea, and published in *Sea Swallow*.

Though monitoring of marine birds is almost unheard of in India, detailed methodologies and the relevance of such studies are well documented (Walsh *et al.* 1995). For some years, regular sea-watching conducted from the Sri Lankan coast has provided interesting records and information (de Silva 1987, 1997) and four years ago it was decided to conduct similar sea-watching surveys from the Indian coast. Kerala was already well-known for its co-ordinated bird surveys to monitor threatened birds of Western Ghats (Praveen and Nameer 2009), and for the last four years the same resources have been utilised for seabird surveys. SW Karnataka and SE India have since followed Kerala's lead, and a total of 16 expeditions, totalling 25 sea days, have now been conducted in the Arabian Sea and Bay of Bengal from ten different points, covering almost all months of the year. In this paper, I summarise the status of various pelagic birds that were recorded during these surveys.

Table 1. Yearly summary.

Year	Days
2010	2
2011	12
2012	9
2013	2

Surveys

Table 1 & 2 provides the summary of various sea bird expeditions from S. India in the last four years. Almost all trips employed fishing boats, and up to 25 bird-watchers and photographers were on board each time. As emphasis was given to photographing the birds, we were able to establish the presence of several species of which we knew little before. Pilot surveys did not focus on estimating numbers but was more focused on documenting the species and learning field identification. However, during the later phases, a more rigorous methodology was evolved based on Bailey (1968) to estimate the abundance level at various distances from the coast (Karuthedathu *et al.* 2012).

Status of Oceanic Birds

Boobies (Sulidae): Masked Booby *Sula dactylatra* is one of the most frequent wind-blown species during the SW monsoon (Karuthedathu *et al.* 2012, Sashikumar *et al.* 2011), but records at sea have been very few. Only 16% of the sea-days recorded this species, with just six sightings; two of an adult (probably the same bird), two of an older immature (probably the same bird) and two juveniles. During the same period, an independent crustacean survey recorded another species, a Brown Booby *S. leucogaster,* slightly north of the study zone in November 2012 (Jamalabad 2013) while a wind-blown Red-footed Booby *S. sula* was recorded from the east coast in May 2011 (Karmakar 2011).

Table 2. Monthly Summary with four seasons coloured.

Month	J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
Days	2	1	2	4	3	0	2	0	6	4	1	0

Petrels & Shearwaters (Procellariidae): This is the most common and diverse group in our waters. Flesh-footed Shearwater *Puffinus carneipes* is the most common seabird in the summer months from late April till early October, and huge concentrations, sometimes up to 500 strong, were recorded near fishing fleets (Chandran *et al.* 2011, Karuthedathu *et al.* 2013). Prior to this study, there was only a single record of this species from the coast of Kerala (Palot 2008) and the bird was considered 'scarce or overlooked' (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012) indicating how sparse our earlier knowledge was. They were also recorded off the east coast during the same period. Though Robertson (1995) suggests that Wedge-tailed Shearwater *P. pacificus* is the commonest Shearwater between the Maldives and Sri Lanka, we have only a single sighting from our studies, and that was of a bird photographed from the coast of Kannur on May 28, 2011. (Praveen *et al.* 2011). Streaked Shearwater *Calonectris leucomelas* is a recent entrant to our pelagic list (Karuthedathu *et al.* 2013) with three sightings from SW India in July and October 2012 and one sighting from SE India in October 2012. This bird probably occurs regularly in small numbers off our coasts. Persian Shearwater *P. persicus*, sometimes considered a race of Audubon's Shearwater *P. lherminieri*, was recorded in flocks in March–April 2011 and 2012, indicating a probable migratory passage. There are also previous wind-blown records of specimens taken during spring from the SW coast of India (Sashikumar *et al.* 2011). The near-threatened Jouanin's Petrel *Bulweria fallax* was recorded only in one of the overnight trips, with about 10 sightings from the coast of Azhekkal, Kannur (c. 90km from the coast) on 24 and 25 September 2011 (Karuthedathu *et al.* 2012). This is the second record from the Kerala coast (Sashikumar *et al.* 2011) and probably the tenth within Indian waters (Robertson 1995, Rahmani 2012). The species probably does not occur close to the coasts and may be more regular near the edge of the continental shelf.

Plates 139–140. (above): Jouanin's Petrel. © *Garima Bhatia;* (below): Persian Shearwater. © *Ashwini Kumar Bhat*

Storm-petrels (Hydrobatidae): Though not diverse, this group also forms an important population of birds that migrate to S. Indian waters. Wilson's Storm-petrel *Oceanites oceanicus* is the most numerous Storm Petrel, recorded on 44% of the sea days and reasonably common from about 40km off-shore between late April till October. Prior to these studies there had been no sightings of this species from Karnataka and just two reports from the coast of Kerala (Chandran *et al.* 2011; Praveen *et al.* 2011). Sometimes congregations of more than 1000 strong have been seen during the peak of the SW monsoon (Karuthedathu *et al.* 2013) along with Flesh-footed Shearwaters. Swinhoe's Storm-petrel *Oceanodroma monorhis* is the only other Storm Petrel recorded during the surveys and it was first reported from the coasts of Indian mainland in July 2011 (Chandran *et al.* 2011). The bird was found to be reasonably common in subsequent surveys in October from the Kerala and Karnataka with up to 67 birds recorded between Neendakara and Vizhinjam in Kerala. However, its status is still not entirely clear as they were recorded in all seasons, though the largest numbers were during autumn, indicating passage migration. During this same period, an undated photograph of a specimen in hand was reported from Andaman Is. through BNHS (Raju Kasambe *pers. comm.*).

Frigatebirds (Fregatidae) & Tropicbirds (Phaethontidae): Every pelagic trip starts with the hope of seeing one of these charismatic species but they are yet to turn up in our lists. Since there are several wind-blown records of two species of Frigatebirds (*Fregata minor* & *F. ariel*) and Tropicbirds (*Phaethon lepturus & P. aethereus*), (Sashikumar *et al.* 2011) these species are expected to turn up at sea eventually.

Skuas & Jaegers (Stercorariidae): This is another group of widespread and numerous pelagic species off our coasts. Contrary to standard guides (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012), Parasitic Jaeger *S. parasiticus* is the most common Jaeger species recorded during the surveys (72% of sea days), with most sightings during September and April. They are sometimes seen with Pomarine Jaeger *S. pomarinus* (12% of sea days) which we recorded on three pelagic trips from the Karnataka and Kerala coasts. Identifications of Jaegers in the field are normally not considered definite until each sighting is supported by a good photograph. In Oct 2012, we saw two individuals of South Polar Skua *S. maccormicki* from the Thiruvananthapuram coast and this happens to be the second definite record of this species from India (Praveen *et al.* 2013).

Plate 141. South Polar Skua. © *Mohanram Kemparaju*

Terns & Gulls (Laridae) Another numerous group at sea are the Laridae - Gulls and Terns; Bridled Terns *Onychoprion anaethetus* are the most abundant of our pelagic terns (92% of sea days) and some individuals are seen throughout the year. Sooty Terns *O. fuscatus*, one of the most numerous species that gets wind-blown to the coasts (Karuthedathu *et al.* 2012), have been recorded only sporadically, in May, July & October. However, juveniles of both species have been recorded during our surveys. Brown Noddy *Anous stolidus* breeds numerously in the Lakshadweep Is. along with Sooty Terns, but is very rare on our coasts with just two sightings from Kochi and one on the SE coast. During the same period, there has been an instance of one wind-blown Brown Noddy to the coasts of Kerala. Great Crested *Thalasseus bergii*, Lesser Crested *T. bengalensis*, Sandwich *T. sandvicensis* and Common Terns *Sterna hirundo* are also recorded at sea while Little *Sternula albifrons*, Whiskered *Chlidonias hybrida* and Gull-billed Terns *Gelochelidon nilotica* along with Brown-headed *Chroicocephalus brunnicephalus*, Black-headed *C. ridibundus*, Pallas's *Ichthyaetus ichthyaetus* and Lesser Black-backed Gulls *Larus fuscus* (*heuglini* race and probably *barabensis* too) are seen closer to land. There have been no records of White-cheeked *S. repressa* or Roseate Terns *S. dougallii* during our surveys, though the fact that they breed only slightly north of our study area in the Vengurla rocks off S. Maharashtra coast makes it likely that we shall see them in the future.

Table 3. Abundance of Pelagic Birds during the survey.

Species	% of Days (number of Days)
Jouanin's Petrel	08% (2)
Flesh-footed Shearwater	56% (14)
Wedge-tailed Shearwater	04% (1)
Streaked Shearwater	12% (3)
Persian Shearwater	16% (4)
Wilson's Storm-petrel	44% (11)
Swinhoe's Storm-petrel	36% (9)
Masked Booby	16% (4)
Arctic Skua	72% (18)
Pomarine Skua	12% (3)
South Polar Skua	4% (1)
Bridled Tern	92% (23)
Brown Noddy	12% (3)
Sooty Tern	24% (6)

Conclusion

These are exciting times for pelagic birding in India, and more and more people are keen to spend time at sea to watch seabirds and photograph them. Our studies have also been keeping in sync with studies elsewhere in the Indian Ocean, in UAE in the west (Huw Roberts *pers. comm.*) and Singapore in the east (Colin Poole *pers. comm.*) - enabling us to compare and share our observations and to produce patterns for species like Swinhoe's Storm-petrel. It is clear that there are still large gaps in our knowledge, for random observations of Tropicbirds, Frigatebirds and Boobies continue to be reported from elsewhere off the Indian coasts and hence it is likely that further sampling will bring to light the true status of all the pelagic species. Competence of field identification is a major limitation, now offset by digital photography - there have been many instances where the species was overlooked in the field but identified later from photographs. All the sightings have been submitted to the RNBWS database and will eventually be available online. A sample of our images is available online in www.orientalbirdimages.org or in Indian Birds, special pelagic issue Volume 7(3).

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Notes on seabird reports received 2012–2013

by Neil Cheshire

The Seabird Report is changing course this year and in future will be more concise and no longer list numerous sightings of well known species from frequently visited areas. Such sightings are still of interest as they add to our knowledge and enhance the database into which they will now be directly entered. The report will continue to list all observers and their voyages. It will concentrate on 1. Observations of rare and seldom reported species. 2. Observations from areas rarely visited. 3. Large concentrations of birds. 4. Significant reports of migration. 5. Behaviour and feeding observations of interest. Recently published scientific papers and articles of interest will be mentioned. The taxonomy follows the Revised RNBWS Checklist (2013).

David Ballance provided an impressive bound copy of his detailed observations made during a cruise from Southampton to the Mediterranean, through the Dardanelles and Bosporus on into the Black Sea and return. Stephen Chapman combined his sail training activities and seabird observations during a long trip from Bermuda to Jersey via the Azores. Simon Cook continued his work as an ornithological guide and provided detailed notes from the Antarctic Peninsula and seldom visited areas around Jan Mayen and Spitzbergen. Steve Copsey made very good use of his draft to HMS *Protector* and supplied a large spreadsheet of his sea and land records. Held over from last year are back records from Peter Fraser from the New Zealand sub-Antarctic islands in 2009 and the western Pacific in 2007. Thomas Johannsen again sent interesting reports from his voyages between east Asia and Australia.

Observers are referred to by their initials. Dates refer to 2012 unless otherwise listed. Positions are given in degrees and decimals of degrees of latitude and longitude. nm = nautical miles (1.852 km), Ad = Adult, h = hours, imm = immature, C = census sheets, R=report sheets.

Table 1.

David K. Ballance (DKB)	m.v. *Black Watch*	Southampton–Mediterranean and Black Sea ports. Sept–Oct 2012. **29R.**
Stephen Chapman (SCh)	s.t.s. *Tenacious* s.t.s. *Lord Nelson*	Bermuda–Azores–Jersey. April–May 2012. **8R.** Bergen area. **1R.**
Simon G. Cook (SGC)	m.v. *Ortelius* m.v. *Fram*	Shetland Is.–Spitzbergen area. Jun–Jul 2012. **4R.** Ushuaia–Antarctic Peninsula, two return voyages. Ushuaia–Falklands–Antarctic Peninsula–South Georgia. Nov–Dec 2012. **12R.**
CPO Steve Copsey (SC)	HMS *Protector*	UK–St. Helena–Simonstown–Tristan da Cunha–Falklands–South Shetlands–Antarctic Peninsula–Falklands. Sept–Dec 2012. **Spreadsheets.**
CPO Steve Copsey CPO Mark Cutts (SC/MC)	HMS *Liverpool*	Liverpool–Harstad–Bergen–Portsmouth. March 2012. **4R.**
Peter Fraser (PF)	m.v. *Professor Khromov* m.v. *Professor Khromov*	New Zealand sub-Antarctic Islands–Chatham Islands–Dunedin. Nov–Dec 2009. **6 spreadsheets.** Auckland–Norfolk Is.–New Caledonia–Solomons–Bougainville–Truk–Kagoshima. Mar–Apr 2007. **7 spreadsheets.**
Capt. Thomas Johannsen (TJ)	m.s. *Fiesta* m.s. *Trina Oldendorff*	Fremantle–Melbourne–Newcastle NSW–Brisbane–Iligan (Phillipines). April–May 2012. **6C.** Penglai (China)–Manilla–Portland (Australia). Feb 2013. **5C.**

Penguins *Spheniscidae*

Emperor Penguin *Aptenodytes forsteri*. SGC was fortunate to have close views of a pair and a single bird at the ice edge in Antarctic Sound at 63.5S 56.6W and 63.4S 56.7W on 11 Dec. **Chinstrap Penguin *Pygoscelis antarctica*.** Three at 58.7S 47.3W 120nm NW S.Orkney Is. on 26 Dec(SGC).

Albatrosses *Diomedeidae*

Southern Royal Albatross *Diomedea epomophora*. One was photographed by SC at 43.6S 24.1W in mid-South Atlantic on 4 Nov and he recorded another at 52.1S 57.9W in the Falklands on 28 Nov. SGC had close views of one in the same area at 51.7S 57.4W on 20 Dec. **Northern Royal Albatross *Diomedea sanfordi*.** PF saw 150 at 44.1S 177.3E west of the Chatham Isands on 29 Nov'09. **Black-browed Albatross *Thalassarche melanophris*.** SGC recorded 5000+ at Diego Ramirez Is. 56.6S 68.6W on 1 Jan'13. **Grey-headed Albatross *Thalassarche chrysostoma*.** SGC observed c.200 at Diego Ramirez Is on 1 Jan'13.

Fulmars *Fulmarinae*

Northern Fulmar *Fulmarus glacialis*. SC/MC recorded c.700 in 3.3h at 63.5N 1.1E offshore from Norway on 7 March and c.800 in 1.7h the next day when approaching the Lofoten Islands at 67.8N 10.6E. **Antarctic Petrel *Thalassoica antarctica*.** Heading south from the Falklands SC saw the first at 60.8S 57.2W on 29 Nov. **Snow Petrel *Pagodroma nivea*.** In what is unusual behaviour for this species SGC had one follow his ship for 7.6h at 60.1S 62.3W on 6 Dec. **Broad-billed Prion *Pachyptila vittata*.** SC observed 2000+ flying away from Tristan during the morning of 31 Oct at 37.1S 12.3W. **Antarctic Prion *Pachyptila desolata*.** SGC encountered concentrations in the Scotia Sea with 1000, some diving and settled on the water at 58.4S 40.9W on 22 Dec and 6–7000 seen in 4h at 58.6S 46.9W on 26 Dec. **Slender-billed Prion *Pachyptila belcheri*.** SGC observed 600+ in 4h at 58.3S 63.4W Drake Passage on 9 Dec. **Fairy Prion *Pachyptila turtur*.** PF had a count of 2500 at 49.4S 178.9E offshore from Antipodes I. on 25 Nov'09 and the same number at 44.1S 177.3W west of the Chatham Is. on 29 Nov'09. **Blue Petrel *Halobaena caerulea*.** SGC saw 71 in 4h at 60.1S 62.3W, Drake Passage on 6 Dec. **Tahiti Petrel *Pseudobulweria rostrata*.** PF had numerous sightings between Norfolk Island and Bougainville 31 Mar–11 April'07 with a maximum count of 65 at 20.2S 163.5E on 4 April'07. **Kermadec Petrel *Pterdroma neglecta*.** One at 14.1S 161.4E south of Rennell Island, Coral Sea on 6 April'07(PF). **Magenta Petrel *Pterodroma magentae*.** PF was fortunate to see this rare and endangered NZ endemic with one at 44.9S 176.9W, SSE of the Chatham Islands where it breeds, on 27 Nov'09. **Bonin Petrel *Pterodroma hypoleuca*.** PF counted 250 at 25.5N 142.7E SW of Ogasawara on 22 April'07. **White-necked Petrel *Pterodroma cervicalis*.** PF recorded 50 in a day in the area 31.2S 170.4E south of Norfolk Island on 29 Mar'07. **Cook's Petrel *Pterodroma cookii*.** PF saw seven at 45.4S174.3E about 200nm ENE from Dunedin on 1 Dec'09.

Shearwaters *Procellariinae*

Grey Petrel *Procellaria cinerea*. A single was seen by SC in mid South Atlantic at 43.6S 24.1W on 4 Nov. **Spectacled Petrel *Procellaria conspicillata*.** SC saw eight including a flock of five at 36.8S 2.4E between Cape Town and Tristan on 28 Oct. **Short-tailed Shearwater *Ardenna tenuirostris*.** PF recorded the arrival of these trans-equatorial migrants in the North Pacific with 6500 at 23.2N 144.6E near Iwo Jima on 21 April'07. **Flesh-footed Shearwater *Ardenna carneipes*.** PF observed one in the North Pacific at 29.0N 141.0E north of Ogasawara on 23 April'07. **Great Shearwater *Ardenna gravis*.** SGC counted 472 in 4h at 53.2S 42.0W in the Scotia Sea on 21 Dec. **Cory's Shearwater *Calonectris d.borealis*.** In the western Mediterranean DKB saw 130 at 37.2N 5.3E on 30 Sept with some feeding over Common Dolphins and Tunny and 325 in 2h the next day at 37.4N 9.4E north of Tunisia. He also recorded 113 mainly flying west in the Straits of Gibraltar at 36.0N 5.7W on 19 Oct. On passage from Bermuda to the Azores SCh saw the first at 37.0N 44.5W on 26 April and thereafter daily in small numbers until 1 May when he saw large rafts of Cory's around Flores and Faial. **Yelkouan Shearwater *Puffinus yelkouan*.** DKB recorded a passage of Yelkouans with 160 heading NE in the Dardanelles, 48 at 40.8N 28.3E and 47 in the Bosporus on 5 Oct and on his return through the Bosporus on 10 Oct he saw 194 heading N into the Black Sea. He also saw eight at 43.3N 28.4E in the

Black Sea on 6 Oct. **Bryan's Shearwater *Puffinus bryani.*** A 'Little Shearwater' found in a burrow and collected on Midway Atoll in February 1963 has recently been re-examined. The biometrics show that it is smaller than any known shearwater and genetic analysis indicates it is a distinct species. It has been named Bryan's Shearwater in honour of Edwin Bryan Jnr. curator at the Bishop Museum Honolulu 1919–1968 (Pyle *et al.* 2011). **Heinroth's Shearwater *Puffinus heinrothi*.** PF had two records this rare species, known to breed only on Bougainville Island, with a single bird at 8.0S 156.0E in the Solomons on 10 April'07 and four at 6.6S 154.7E near Bougainville the next day. **Little Shearwater *Puffinus assimillis*.** SC observed two ssp *elegans* (Subantarctic Little Shearwater) at 37S 3.1W east of Tristan on 29 Oct. This form was also seen by PF with three near the NZ Antipodes Islands on 25 Nov'09 and 28 at the Bounty Islands the next day.

Diving-petrels *Pelecanoidinae*

Common Diving Petrel *Pelecanoides urinatrix*. PF observed 1000 at 51.6S 165.4E south of the Auckland Islands on 18 Nov'09.

Storm-petrels *Hydrobatidae*

Southern Storm-petrels *Oceanitinae*

Pincoya Storm-petrel *Oceanites pincoyae.* A recently discovered species the Pincoya Storm-petrel *Oceanites pincoyae* from the Puerto Montt, Chacao Channel area of Chile(42S) has been described by Peter Harrison and twelve co-authors (Harrison *et al.* 2013). Similar to Elliots and Wilson's Storm-petrels but with bold white ulnar bars and white panels to the underwing it has unique behaviour and foraging ecology. **Grey-backed Storm-petrel *Garrodia nereis*.** PF saw 25 at 44.1S 177.3W near the Chatham Islands on 27 Nov'09. **White-faced Storm-petrel *Pelagodroma marina*.** Large numbers were seen by PF near the Chatham Islands with 1000 at 44.9S 176.9W on 27 Nov'09 and 500 at 44.1S 177.3W on 29 Nov'09. **Black-bellied Storm-petrel *Fregetta tropica*.** PF recorded 25 at 45.4S 174.3E 200nm ENE of Dunedin on 1 Dec'09. **Polynesian Storm-petrel *Nesofregetta fuliginosa*.** PF observed this seldom reported storm-petrel off New Caledonia with one at 23S 166.4E on 1 April'07 and three at 20.2S 163.5E on 4 April'07.

Northern Storm-petrels *Hydrobatinae*

Matsudaira's Storm-petrel *Oceanodroma matsudairae.* PF recorded the species from north of Truk at 10.6N 150.1E on 17 April'07 to 31N 136.4E south of Japan on 24 April with a maximum count of 50 at 25.5N 142.7E on 22nd in the Bonin Islands where they are winter breeders.

Tropicbirds *Phaethontidae*

Red-billed Tropic-bird *Phaethon aethereus*. SCh photographed one north of the normal range in the North Atlantic at 33.2N 59.8W east of Bermuda on 20 April.

Gannets and Boobies *Sulidae*

Red-footed Booby *Sula sula*. SC had one on board at 28.2N 16.0W near Tenerife on 23 Sept that proved to be the first record for the Canary Islands (Birding World 25:371).

Sandpipers and Snipes *Scolopacidae*

Grey(Red) Phalarope *Phalaropus fulicarius.* Two at 43.7N 9.8W off NW Spain on 27 Sept and 16 at 40.5N 9.8W off Portugal on 20 Oct.(DKB).

Skuas and Jaegers *Stercorariidae*

Great Skua *Stercorarius skua*. DKB saw three feeding over dolphins sp. in the northern Bay of Biscay at 47.6N 6.8W on 26 Sept and one at 37.4N 9.4E north of Tunisia on 1 Oct. One was recorded by SGC from the far north, in an area of heavy drift ice near Spitzbergen at 80.8N 21.9E on 6 July. **South Polar Skua *Stercorarius mccormicki*.** PF saw single birds in the North Pacific at 23.2N 144.6E off Iwo Jima on 21 April'07 and at 29.0N 141.0E north Ogasawara on 23 April'07.SGC recorded a southbound movement with eight in 4h at 62.0S 64.5W on 15 Dec'12. **Pomarine Skua *Stercorarius pomarinus*.** A northerly record from SGC of one at 81.0N 14.6E on 30 June. Seldom recorded in the Black Sea area, DKB saw one Arctic/Pomarine? there at 43.8N 28.3W near the Bulgarian coast on 6 Oct and a Pomarine at 41.6N 29.6E NE from the Bosporus on 10 Oct. **Long-tailed Skua *Stercorarius longicaudus*.** SC saw two at 23.4N 18.0W off Mauretania on 24 Sept. Although it is a regular visitor to the seas around south-east Australia and New Zealand in moderate numbers during the southern summer, there

are very few records of the species on passage in the Pacific. PF observed one at 31.2S 170.4E south of Norfolk Island on 29 Mar'07, two at 6.1N 152.3E south of Truk on 15 April'07, one at 19.6N 146.2E, Northern Marianas on 20 April'07, one at 23.2N 144.6E off Iwo Jima on 21 April'07, one at 25.5N 142.7E south of the Bonin Is on 22 April'07, seven the next day at 29.0N 141.0E and two south of Japan at 31.0N 136.4E on 24 April'07.

Gulls *Laridae*

Black-tailed Gull *Larus crassirostris*. In the Yellow Sea TJ recorded 50 at 37.4N 123.5E on 7 Feb'13 and 30 the next day at 32.0N 124.9E. **Kelp Gull *Larus dominicanus*.** SC recorded six at the southern limit of their range at 65.1S 64.0W, Lemaire Channel, Antarctic Peninsula on 10 Dec. **Glaucous Gull *Larus hyperboreus*.** On passage to the Lofoten Islands SC/MC saw singles at 66.4N 8.1E and 67.2N 9.1E and six at 67.7N 10.6E on 8 Mar. Further north SGC recorded one at 81N 14.6E on 30 June and four at 80.8N 21.9E on 6 July. **Audouin's Gull *Larus audouinii*.** One at 39.4N 2.7E near Palma, Mallorca on 17 Oct.(DKB). **Yellow-legged Gull *Larus michahellis*.** DKB observed 5000+ gulls in the Bosporus on 5 Oct of which about 60–80% were Yellow-legged and the rest mostly Black-headed. **Sabine's Gull *Larus sabini*.** An interesting observation by DKB of Sabines on their southerly migration with a count of 188 (including 110 in one flock) in 2.5h at 40.5N 9.8W off Portugal on 20 Oct. **Ivory Gull *Pagophilia eburnea*.** North of Spitzbergen SGC saw one at 81.0N 14.6E on 30 June and three at 80.8N 21.9E on 6 July.

Terns *Sterninae*

Spectacled Tern *Onychoprion lunatus*. Seldom reported from the western tropical Pacific PF saw one at 8S 156E in the Solomons on 10 April, three at 6.6S 154.7E near Bougainville on the 11th, two at 3.5S 154.3E on the 12th and one at 19.6N 146.2E in the Northern Marianas on 20 April'07. **Sooty Tern *Sterna fuscata*.** A feeding flock of 400+ was seen by SC at 5.6S 10.3W about 270nm NE from Ascension I. on 1 Oct. **Antarctic Tern *Sterna vittata*.** Seven at 37.1S 12.3W near Tristan da Cunha on 31 Oct and four at 65.1S 64.0W Lemaire Channel, Antarctic Peninsula on 10 Dec.(SC). **Black Noddy *Anous minutuus*.** In the western Pacific PF saw large flocks with 2500 at 9S 160E off Guadalcanal on 8 April'07 and 2500 at 3.5S 154.3E off Latangai on 12 April'07.

Alcids *Alcidae*

Little Auk *Alle alle*. One at 73.4N 0.2E north of Jan Mayen on 22 June, 18 at 81.0N 14.6E north of Spitzbergen on 30 June and six at 80.8N 21.9E on 6 July, with the last two observations being in an area of heavy drift ice.(SGC). **Thick-billed Murre *Uria lomvia*.** North of Spitzbergen SGC counted 754 in 4h at 81.0N 14.6W on 30 June and 66 in 4h at 80.8N 21.9E on 6 July. **Black Tystie *Cepphus grylle*.** SGC recorded 18 at 81.0N 14.6E on 30 June and 34 at 80.8N 21.9E on 6 July. **Atlantic Puffin *Fratercula arctica*.** SGC recorded one at 73.4N 0.2E on 22 June, and one at 81.0N 14.6E on 30 June.

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Landbirds from ships at sea

by Lieutenant Chris Patrick RN

Reports of landbirds at sea were received from only two observers for 2012; **Stephen Chapman** - STS Tenacious on a trip from Bermuda to the Channel Islands via the Azores in Apr–May 2012, 7 records. **Lt Chris Patrick RN** - Operating in the North Atlantic between Mar and Aug 2012, 20 records.

North Atlantic (East of 30°W) and Bay of Biscay

In a strong easterly wind, CP had a Northern Lapwing *Vanellus vanellus* land on the foredeck whilst 70NM west of the Isles of Scilly, at 49 30N 008 00W, on 14 March. The following day a Wood Pigeon *Columba palumbus* spent a couple of hours onboard, 390NM west of the Isles of Scilly, at 49N 15W.

During his voyage across the North Atlantic SC saw several Barn Swallows *Hirundo rustica*. The first one was flying around the ship on 7 May whilst still 400NM west of Cape Finnisterre, at 42 39N 017 23W. On 10 May another flew around the ship and landed on the deck whilst 80NM off of Ushant at 47 48N 007 11W.

On 23 August, 70NM northwest of Iceland at 66 30N 026 00W, CP had a male Greenland Wheatear *Oenanthe oenanthe leucorhoa* onboard for several hours. On 26 Aug at 67 30N 023 00W 70NM north of Iceland he photographed a male Merlin *Falco columbarius* flying past the ship heading strongly northwest with only 115NM to go to reach Greenland.

English Channel, North Sea, Irish Sea, Norwegian Sea and Baltic

In an increasing north-northwesterly wind on 11 May, as SC rounded Ushant at a range of around 6NM, a single Barn Swallow was seen at 0745, a group of 4 flew past at 1000, and were followed by 2 more singles before midday. On 26 May CP had a female Blackcap *Sylvia atricapilla* and a Willow Warbler *Phylloscopus trochilus* onboard 60NM southwest of the Isles of Scilly at 49 00N 007 30W.

North Atlantic (West of 30°W)

Whilst half a mile south of Flores, Azores, on 30 April, SC saw a Ruddy Turnstone *Arenaria interpres* fly low past the ship. On 18 May at approximately 48N 032W in the mid North Atlantic CP had a European Golden Plover *Pluvialis apricaria* perched on a lifeboat davit for half an hour. The following day in a similar position a female/immature Summer Tanager *Piranga rubra* briefly landed on the ship before heading off strongly towards the east and Europe with a strong tail wind to assist it. On 28 July, again in the mid North Atlantic, a single Barn Swallow of the North American race *Hirundo rustica erythrogaster* landed on board for a while. The following day saw the arrival, in ones and twos, of 8 more North American Barn Swallows along with 2 Cliff Swallows *Hirundo pyrrhonota*, an adult and a juvenile.

Plates 142–143 [opposite]. **(left):** Peregrine Falcon (N. American race); **(right):** European Golden Plover. **Plates 144–146 [above].** **(top):** Northern (Greenland) Wheatear; **(lower left):** Yellow Warbler; **(lower right):** Spotted Sandpiper. © All *Chris Patrick*

On 5 August at 45N 053W, 120NM southeast of Newfoundland, CP had a Spotted Sandpiper *Tringa macularia* walking around the foredeck for several hours. Unfortunately, it was found dead the following day. On 7 August another North American Barn Swallow was flying around the ship, 65NM south of Nova Scotia at 42.5N 065W. The following day whilst 12 NM off of Cape Cod, an immature male Yellow Warbler *Dendroica petechia* entered the bridge just after dawn and remained there while a juvenile Peregrine Falcon *Falco peregrinus* of the North American migratory subspecies *tundrius* patrolled the skies around the ship and repeatedly perched on the foremast and bridge wings.

On 13 August, a juvenile Cedar Waxwing *Bombycilla cedrorum* flew over the ship 70NM east of Cape Cod. The next day a Tree Swallow *Hirundo nigricans* flew past the ship, 150NM southeast of Nova Scotia. On 15 August, 200NM south of Newfoundland, a North American Barn Swallow briefly lingered around the ship. A Black-tailed Godwit *Limosa limosa* flew over the ship several times, 400NM east of Newfoundland, on the 18 August. Its breeding grounds are over 1300NM to the northeast in Iceland, so it may well have been heading for Canada where it is a rare but annual visitor. A North American Barn Swallow was sighted 350NM south of Greenland on 21 August.

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Plate 147. A Gannet approaching its colony. © *Simon Cook*

Gannets galore

by Simon Cook

A bird enthusiast from boyhood, Simon Cook worked in a bank for nineteen years but in 1994 became a full-time lecturer and naturalist on cruise ships. An RNBWS member for many years, he has visited all seven continents, and has contributed several articles for Sea Swallow as well as many records for the RNBWS database.

In late May 2012 I was lucky enough to be working for an English travel company on board their chartered expedition cruise ship. Canadian-owned and converted from a Baltic ferry, the *M.S. Expedition* was home to just 90 guests on what was, in essence, a circumnavigation of Ireland from Portsmouth to Portsmouth. Billed as a 'Bird Islands' cruise, the itinerary was full of remote and exciting islands, many of which are home to significant seabird colonies. Added to the anticipation of a superb trip was the surprising and slightly surreal prospect of a heatwave.

The cruise got off to a good start, with a Crow on board, a fly-past by a Great-crested Grebe, a steam-past by the Queen Mary 2 (ex-Southampton) and at the end of the day a glorious sunset. The following morning found us on a flat calm sea under a sunny sky at Les Sept Isles. This group of small islands lies just off the coast of Brittany and is a popular destination for local sightseers and fishermen. The attraction for us was the large Gannet colony on the easternmost island, Ile Rouzic, and the plan was to use our fleet of inflatable zodiacs to make a close approach. Whilst waiting for the guests to disembark from the ship a couple of Manx Shearwaters were spotted and a female Peregrine flew past towards the shore.

The Gannet colony was large and impressive and consisted of perhaps 10,000 nests - it was difficult to estimate them all from a moving boat! There was a constant swirl of these huge birds around the colony and much to-ing and fro-ing from the sea. One disturbing aspect was the sight of green fishing net fragments that were incorporated into many of the nests. As we drifted near the rocks a curious male Grey Seal made a close approach, while nearby there were Herring and Great Black-back Gulls, Oystercatchers, Rock Pipits, together with small numbers of Razorbill, Guillemot and Puffin. During the afternoon the ship was underway and highlights included a Leach's Petrel, 16–17 small shorebirds, an unidentified whale, 7 Harbour Porpoises (including two tiny calves) and two small Ocean Sunfish. Another huge, orange setting sun to the west was balanced in the east by views of Land's End and Wolf Rock lighthouse.

Our approach to Lundy the following morning revealed numerous Manx Shearwaters and there was a Collared Dove aboard; it soon flew off towards the island, the top of which was hidden by cloud. By the time we anchored the ship was enveloped in thick fog, which made seeing any kind of bird ashore a challenge. However, a short walk around the settlement area rewarded me with Wheatear, Sedge Warbler, Spotted Flycatcher and a Peregrine that was calling from the foggy cliff below me. The fog stayed with us for some time after we left but we were accompanied by numerous Short-beaked Common Dolphins before we burst out into the sunshine near the Welsh island of Skomer. Here we had a zodiac cruise and, in addition to a profusion of wild flowers such as bluebells and red campion, the local Puffins, Guillemots, Razorbills, Fulmars, Kittiwakes and Grey Seals were seen at close quarters. A single Chough was not quite so obliging though. Our last destination of the day was the well-known but little-visited island of Grassholm, which we slowly circled. There are said to be 34,000 Gannet nests here and much of the island was white with birds and guano. In the sunshine the colony was very impressive and some birds were still arriving with their beaks full of nesting material. The ship provided a high vantage point, thus giving us much better views than those from the local trip-boat, which was bouncing around in the swell.

The heat-wave continued so we entered Holyhead, on Anglesey, under yet another cloudless sky; a Herring Gull joined us aboard. Today we went on two excursions, to South Stack and Cemlyn Bay. At the former site some foraging Choughs were very obliging, having been seen from the bus as it pulled into the car park. The ledges on the cliffs were mainly occupied by Guillemots and after the hundreds of Puffins at Skomer it was now a real challenge just to see one. A few people were lucky enough to get brief views of a Peregrine. An alternative attraction for a few of us was the lighthouse itself, which was open. Standing in the cramped lamp room watching the sun glinting off the revolving lenses was almost mesmerising. At Cemlyn Bay the chief interest was the large tern colony, where there were three species nesting - Common, Arctic and Sandwich. More interesting, for me anyway, were the two pairs of Red-breasted Mergansers sharing the lagoon with the terns.

The next port of call on our whistle-stop cruise was Portrush, for the Irish end of the famed Giant's Causeway. On the way a Buzzard was added to the species list and at the causeway itself three species of warbler were noted - Sedge, Willow and Common Whitethroat. Another, by now common, Peregrine drifted along the clifftop before landing on a vantage point. But Rathlin

Plate 148. The Little Skellig Gannetry with Skellig Michael beyond. © *Simon Cook*

Island beckoned so we were soon on our way again. There weren't enough seats on the small buses for all of us for the trip to the (RSPB) seabird cliffs so some of us went off on a walk, while we waited for our turn, to see what we could find. There were lots of Eider, Ringed Plovers and Harbour Seals with single Buzzard, Sand Martin and Reed Bunting. The highlight was a mammal, rather than a bird, the so-called Rathlin Golden Hare, which was certainly different from the common kind. As it happened, my group never got to the cliffs, because a wheel came off one of the buses, so once we were all back on the ship, we cruised along below them. There were thousands of Guillemots and Kittiwakes on the stacks and cliffs and we even saw a couple of Great Skuas. The evening was clear and the visibility was so good that we could see the Mull of Kintyre, Islay and the peaks of Arran as we set sail for Scotland's Inner Hebrides.

Iona brought back memories from 2003 when my wife and I were married on board another ship at anchor in the Sound of Iona. I noted that *Expedition* anchored at the self- same spot. I was hoping to be able to spend some time looking for Corncrakes but it was my turn to shuttle people ashore and back. As a result, I had little over an hour to look around but I did, to my very great surprise and delight, manage to hear two crakes and see a further three, including one that was 'singing'. I had excellent views, but a calling bird that was ridiculously close to me remained invisible. The day, yet again, was hot, sunny and flat calm and on the way to nearby Staffa a Basking Shark was seen. At Staffa there was no movement at all on the sea so we took full advantage of the conditions and in the zodiacs went right to the end of not only Fingal's Cave but also the one next to it. Surprisingly, there was a single, lingering, Purple Sandpiper on the rocks. There was another surprise on the way to nearby Lunga - an adult White-tailed Eagle. Initially it was flying low over the sea but then it soared to a great height. Lunga was one of the highlights of the cruise, having a multitude of flowers such as thrift, marsh marigolds, primroses and bluebells. There were also many breeding Fulmars, Kittiwakes and Guillemots plus a few Shags, Ravens, Rock Pipits, Wheatears and passing Gannets. The stars of the show though were the Puffins - some 2,000 of them. There was a natural, grassy, clifftop terrace with a spectacular view, where many of the birds seemed to be waiting for us, and by spreading out and sitting down quietly we had very close views indeed. Curiosity got the better of some of the puffins and some people had their boots and legs pecked by the bolder birds. It would have been a great way to end the day but there was more to come, from the ship - Harbour Porpoise, over 200 Manx Shearwaters, a green flash at sunset and, at midnight, an orange afterglow and a bright half-moon. In my notebook I recorded that it was my best ever day in the British Isles.

On the morning of the 28th we were back in Irish waters, off the northwest coast, approaching Tory Island. From the stone pier a good variety of birds could be seen: Dunlin, Ringed Plover, Oystercatcher, Turnstone, Whimbrel, Little Tern, Swift and two Choughs that were turning seaweed over at the high-tide line. A walk to the eastern end of the island was much longer than expected but Skylark, Redpoll, Tree Sparrow and Short-eared Owl were added to the species list. Back in the village there was another chance to see Corncrakes - one male was watched for some time whilst another, an even closer bird, crept by. Two more males were heard; the habitat was short, rough grass with nettle beds. The sea was still flat calm and on our way to the south, down the west coast of the Emerald Isle, there was plenty to keep us out on deck: a Great Skua, 6 European Storm-petrels, numerous Manx Shearwaters, 11 Harbour Porpoise, 6–8 Bottlenose Dolphin, about 10 Short-beaked Common Dolphin and at least seven more Basking Sharks; at the end of the day there was another green flash.

The islands of Little Skellig and Skellig Michael were visited next but the weather had changed and we saw our first waves of the cruise, though the wind was only force 3–4. Another small ship was making a landing at the larger island but we could quite clearly see, up at the top, the famous, beehive-shaped monastic cells. Also at the top of the island was a Peregrine, which was playing with a Hooded Crow, although the

Plates 149–154. (opposite, clockwise): A posturing, ringed, Shag; A close view of nesting Gannets, Great Saltee; Thrift and part of the Great Saltee gannetry; South Stack, Anglesey, the site of a large seabird colony; Razorbill, Common Guillemot and Kittiwake; Atlantic Puffin on Great Saltree. © All *Simon Cook*

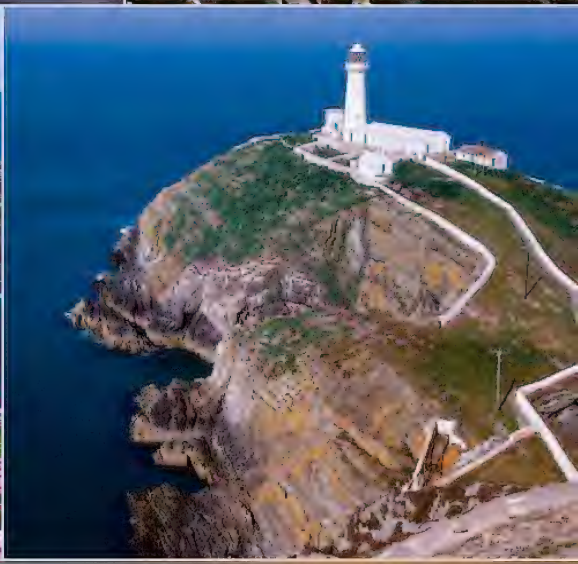

Plate 155. Watching Puffins on Lunga, Inner Hebrides. © *Simon Cook*

latter didn't seem too enthusiastic! A slow cruise around Little Skellig gave us fabulous views of the gannetry; there were perhaps 20,000 birds in residence and the sight was very impressive. In the afternoon we were ashore for a bus tour around part of the Ring of Kerry, which gave us an hour in the highly commercialised village of Sneem. Colleagues who had been before spoke of Dippers on the river but it was completely unsuitable so I adjourned to the adjacent bar for a consolation Guinness.

I have known of the Saltee Islands, off the southern coast of Ireland, for many years but had never had the chance to visit. Our landing was made on privately-owned Great Saltee, under another sunny sky and it was very warm but breezy. This island too was covered with flowers and we had the freedom to roam where we wished. On the side opposite the landing place was a small stack-colony of, yes, Gannets. They made a nice picture using a wide-angle lens, with pink thrift in the bottom of the viewfinder. At the southern end of the island there was a much larger colony, which we could literally have walked right up to, there being no fences or 'keep out' signs. However, we kept our distance and watched the birds come and go. There were also close Shags and Razorbills to watch and, elsewhere, there were equally obliging Kittiwakes, Guillemots and Puffins. There were landbirds too, in the shape of House & Sand Martin, Swift, Goldfinch, Reed Bunting, Spotted Flycatcher and Chough - up to seven in the air together. They were a real pleasure to watch but although they frequently landed they kept well out of camera range. After a very worthwhile visit we sailed away and, from my dinner table, I watched a few more Manx Shearwaters pass by.

Our last landing of the voyage was on Tresco, one of the Scilly Isles. Here there were no seabird colonies to visit but at least the weather was still good. A walk in the vicinity of the abbey, on the lookout for migrants, produced only the 'locals' - Sandwich Tern, Gadwall, Shelduck and a family of Stonechats. The nearby gardens were a delight but had very few birds. By creeping around quietly though I did get very close views of a stunning male Golden Pheasant, who was keeping close company with no less than three females. This was also an opportunity to see again the excellent collection of ship figureheads.

Once we were back aboard and underway, there were very few birds around but the following morning, just outside Portsmouth harbour, the last Gannets of the trip were seen. During the voyage we had enjoyed unimaginably good weather, had seen a huge variety of birds, other animals and flowers, had met many friendly people and visited some very exciting and out-of-the-way places. This was British Isles cruising at its very best! And to reinforce just how lucky we were and just how fickle the British weather can be, a few days after disembarking at Portsmouth the wind-speed where I live in South Wales topped 60 mph!

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Plate 156. Young Antarctic Shags at the small Pleneau Island. © *Simon Cook*

100 Not out!

by Simon Cook

The Southern Ocean provides much food for a great variety of seabirds, such as penguins, petrels and albatrosses and I am particularly familiar with the Drake Passage, between the southern tip of South America and the northern tip of the Antarctic Peninsula. Past experience has shown that the best area for albatrosses tends to be the quadrant to the east and south of the infamous Cape Horn. Here the seafloor rises from the abyssal plain, at a depth of approximately 4,000 metres to a depth of less than 100 metres.

The Black-browed Albatross breeds on the islands here and so too, does the Grey-headed, especially on the small islands of the Diego Ramirez group. This is actually the southernmost point in South America, lying some 60 nautical miles to the southwest of Cape Horn. Cruise ships heading north from Antarctica to the Argentinian port of Ushuaia invariably head for the cape, which makes an impressive end to what for many is the trip of a lifetime.

It was in the waters close to the cape that I found myself on the morning of 20 January, 2013, heading south from Ushuaia, Tierra del Fuego. I was working on a French cruise ship as a lecturer and naturalist. However, on this crossing there was much fog and thus few birds, but I did see four albatross species: Wandering, Southern Royal, Grey-headed and Black-browed. Duties such as meetings (and 'eatings') limited my birding time so the only other species to be recorded on the first day were Blue and Cape Petrel and Black-bellied Storm-petrel. A very close Fin Whale in the late afternoon generated a lot of excitement among the passengers.

Our approach to the South Shetland Islands was made largely through thick fog but by the time we reached Nelson Strait, between Nelson and Robert islands, visibility had improved significantly. Some way ahead of the ship was what appeared to be a cloud of insects over the water. They were Wilson's Storm-petrels and I estimated that there were

approximately 3,000 of them feeding on a slick. The trail was several hundred yards long and I was expecting to see a dead whale at the end of it but there was no sign of anything at all. Perhaps there was something leaching fluids below the surface? I had never before seen such a sight so I quickly alerted the passengers via the p.a. system. At our approach the birds dispersed a little and we then saw the first Southern Giant Petrel, Southern Fulmar, Chinstrap Penguin, South Polar Skua, Antarctic Shag and Antarctic Tern of the voyage.

Our crossing to Antarctica had been so fast that we were able to make a bonus landing at Half Moon Island. It is the remains of an old volcano and nestles in the shadow of the mountains and glaciers of Livingston Island. Humpback Whales were seen on the way in but the avian attraction was a colony of Chinstrap Penguins, which had large chicks. The birds were in several large groups so everybody was able to get close (but smelly) views. Another attraction was Weddell Seal, six of which slumbered on snow that still largely covered the ground. During the night we headed southwest, down through the Bransfield Strait and into the narrower Gerlache Strait.

At 05.30 in the morning the sea was flat calm with fog, but that soon cleared. Our destination for the morning was Neko Harbour and on the way we passed at least a dozen Humpback Whales, some of which may have come from as far away as Costa Rica to feed. Neko Harbour, in Andvoord Bay, was our chance to land on the continent itself, rather than islands. Another attraction was another penguin colony, this time Gentoos. Set beside a frequently-calving ice wall, the birds seemed perfectly at ease but when a moderate tsunami hit the beach the penguins were already running away from it. These birds too had chicks; two per pair is normal for the three 'brushtail' penguins, the third species being Adelie. It was possible to ascend the slope at the side of the colony to get far-reaching views of ice-filled waters, mountains, glaciers and distant, snowy mountains. Around the colony were predators (Brown Skua) and scavengers (Kelp Gull) but the resident pair of Pale-faced Sheathbills were forced to move on when the refuge hut that they nested under was removed a few years ago.

During lunch the ship made a northbound transit through the spectacular Errera Channel but all the channels here are spectacular! With Ronge Island to port and the continent to starboard we were heading the short distance to Cuverville Island. Once again we saw Humpback Whales and lots of icebergs. Just before the anchorage was reached a colony of shags was passed. By now light rain was falling but it soon stopped, enabling us to enjoy the largest Gentoo colony in Antarctica, with something like 5,000 pairs. The rain had saturated the copious penguin droppings so there were a few wrinkled noses among the passengers, who had to walk through the guano.

The following morning found us in the shallow and rocky Flandres Bay, en route for the fabled Lemaire Channel and Petermann Island. More humpbacks were followed by other marine mammals - a Crabeater Seal and three Leopard Seals. They were all on ice floes and one of the predatory leopards was particularly close to us. Nowadays there are mostly Gentoo Penguins on Petermann but at the northern end of the island there are still perhaps 200 pairs of Adelies. Their chicks were downy and fat but had not yet started to wander away from the nests into protective crèches. Down below me the shags had very large chicks and I noticed that several nests had three youngsters so food must have been plentiful. I was also pleased to note a single Wilson's Storm-petrel, another species that nests on the island.

At the adjacent Yalour Islands, after lunch, our zodiacs were dropped into the water and we loaded the guests into them for a scenic cruise. There is one main, low-lying, round-topped island and numerous smaller ones, many of which have Adelie Penguins nesting on them. Here too there was much ice in the water and at one place, on a low cliff, there was another shag colony. I think that the highlight for many people was the Leopard Seals, several of which were seen. I spotted one in the water near an iceberg and it soon came swimming over to us to check us out. Nearby there were others on small floes and they tolerated a very close approach. These large, reptilian seals can be 10 feet or more in length and can often be found at penguin colonies, looking for a meal. Not long afterwards, on the way back to the ship, I spotted *H.M.S. Protector*, heading south. She

Plates 157–163. (previous page): An Adelie Penguin watches our ship, Le Boreal; South Polar Skua; A Brown or Antarctic Skua; Resting Gentoo Penguin, Neko Harbour; Pale-faced Sheathbill chick; Adult Antarctic Shag. **(below):** A Gentoo Penguin feeding its chick. © All *Simon Cook*

was an impressive sight but I have to admit to preferring the cleaner lines of her predecessor, *Endurance*.

Another day dawned and we were out in the boats again. This time I got very good views of a Wilson's Storm-petrel and two superb Snow Petrels. In the afternoon we paid a visit to an old station (Base 'A') that was established in 1944 as part of 'Operation Tabarin', an exercise to establish a British presence on the Antarctic Peninsula. Now known as Port Lockroy, it is one of the most visited places in Antarctica and features a museum, post office and gift shop. Here I had further close views of a Leopard Seal on a floe, but it was whales that stole the show - I spotted a pod of about 30 so-called Pack Ice Killer Whales and we tracked them for some time. The group consisted of, amongst others, several large males and a female with a small calf. Some of the pod were hunting an Antarctic Minke Whale, which was making desperate efforts to escape but the outcome was unknown. Numerous Humpback Whales were in the area and two breached very close to the ship.

The next highlight was Antarctic Sound, at the northern end of the peninsula. At Brown Bluff there are both Gentoo and Adelie penguins breeding but also, under a large rock, there is often a Snow Petrel to be found. A check revealed a large downy chick. Later on all the guests were deposited onto a large floe, part of the extensive pack ice that blocked the sound to the south. Heading northwards for Drake Passage brought us into contact with two massive Southern Right Whales. They were seen very well, both at the surface and below it, right next to us. A single Antarctic Petrel the following morning stayed with us for at least two and a half hours but the northbound crossing, en route to Ushuaia, was quiet.

Things livened up a little in the area near Cape Horn, for there was a westerly storm and many more birds, including hundreds of Sooty Shearwaters and three Great Shearwaters. Both Wandering and Southern Royal Albatross came close to the ship. The journey along the Beagle Channel was interesting too, with thousands of Imperial Shags, hundreds of Magellanic Penguins, about 300 South American Sea Lions and three playful Peale's Dolphins. We docked just before eight in the evening and looking out from my balcony across to the light aircraft aerodrome I was delighted to see one of the southernmost Short-eared Owls in the world, quartering the rough grassy area. It was a fitting end to a very rewarding trip, but why the curious title for the article, you may ask? Well, this voyage was my 100th to Antarctica!

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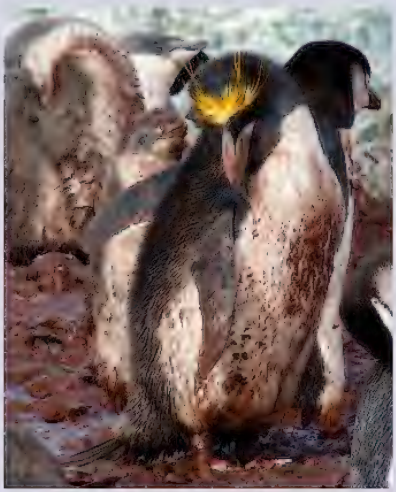

Plate 164. Macaroni Penguins. © *Simon Cook*

All at sea - sparrows and swifts

by Simon Cook

On the morning of 6 May 2013 I was aboard the *M.V. Plancius*, a small passenger ship en route from the Cape Verde Islands to Madeira via the continental shelf edge off Mauritania and Western Sahara. At first light the ship was off the small island of Raso, and the plan was to take the passengers out in our fleet of zodiacs after breakfast in search of the endemic Raso Lark.

After a quick meal I went up to the bridge to find that we were steaming just over 1 nautical mile off the eastern end of the island, and I was very surprised to see a flock of Iago Sparrows, *Passer iagoensis,* birds that are endemic to the Cape Verde Islands, on the open deck behind the bridge. I alerted everyone via the p.a. system and as the ship moved to the western end of the island an astonishing count of approximately 40 birds was made. What had made so many of them fly so far out from the island was not clear.

The zodiac cruise lasted until late morning and many more sparrows flew out to the boats, landing on both the boats and the people in them. At one point I had about 20 with me and birds were flying from boat to boat. Although some people gave them water, as far as I am aware none of the sparrows stayed on the boats on the way back to the ship, which had been drifting some way offshore during the zodiac operation. Once my boat had been retrieved I went up on deck to find that although we were now sailing away from Raso there were still about 20 sparrows on board, and they were to remain with us for several days.

Plate 167. Iago Sparrow. © *Simon Cook*

Meanwhile, early on the morning of 10 May we had another little burst of excitement. We were heading north at 12 knots in fine weather, with the Canary Islands visible in the distance. On deck since first light, I was astonished to see, at 0720, a Plain Swift, *Apus unicolour,* approaching from astern. Our position was 26° 42' North, 017° 04' West - some 75 nautical miles SE of Hierro and 80 nm South of Gomera. This bird slowly overhauled us, passing close by, and more were to come, as my log shows:

1 at 08.40 @ 26° 56′ N, 017° 08′ W
4 at 08.59 @ 27° 00′ N, 017° 07′ W
1 at 10.00 @ 27° 11′ N, 017° 07′ W
2 at 10.40–44 @ 27° 20′ N, 017° 07′ W
2 at 10.49 @ 027° 22′ N, 017° 06′ W

Plates 165–166. (left): Iago Sparrows; (right): Simon Cook with Iago Sparrow. © All *Simon Cook*

Plate 168. Plain Swift. © *R Schoones*

In total, 15 birds were logged by the birders who were out on deck and all of the birds were heading north. Plain Swifts breed on Madeira and the Canary Islands and a proportion of the population overwinters somewhere in Africa, so if they had been flying due north since leaving the African coast, their point of departure would have been somewhere in Western Sahara.

But back to our sparrows. From the moment of their arrival they were oblivious to people, and as *Plancius* continued her cruise towards Madeira some of the passengers took it upon themselves to put down food and water, rather than watch the birds starve. From 7–12 May there were 11 birds with us - 4 males, 6 females and one immature male. They had three favoured places on the ship: among the gangways behind the funnel (where I suspect they roosted), on the open deck behind the bridge, and down in the bow between and on the anchor cables. Getting down to the bow invariably led the sparrows to fly up over the bridge and risk being caught up in the slipstream and occasional strong headwinds, but they all seemed to cope well with the strange new conditions on their moving home.

On the morning of 12 May the ship was approaching the Desertas Islands, to the south of Madeira with a strong wind from the northeast. In the morning I counted the usual 11 birds and a pair was even seen copulating beside the funnel. Having made a close pass of the island of Bugio the ship dropped anchor at Desertas Grande at noon. A landing was made and there was a barbecue ashore in the evening, before the ship sailed again at 03.00. Early in the evening I had occasion to return briefly to the ship and discovered that there were only 1 female and 4 males. Several things could have happened to the missing birds - they were out of sight, had been swept away by the wind, or perhaps had flown ashore to Bugio or Deserta Grande. I kept my eyes open for the next few hours, but didn't see any sparrows at all, and nor did I hear of any being seen by any of the other people, many of whom were birders.

On the following morning (13 May), as we approached Funchal, the count had increased to six. The ship docked at 11.00 and shortly afterwards a great cheer went up as one of the males flew onto the passenger terminal walkway. However, his foray was short-lived, for he returned almost immediately on board. Shortly afterwards the other five sparrows followed suit but they too returned on board, and were still there when the passengers disembarked that afternoon. I myself left the ship at 1600, and watched *Plantius* sail for Holland shortly after, still with the six birds on board.

Later I heard that 5 sparrows made it to Holland, but a complaint was made about the introduction of an alien species, so the relevant ministry ordered that they all be captured. In the event, one was found to be dead, two were caught (subsequent fate unknown) and the other two, a male and a female, had disappeared and were presumed to have flown ashore.

This particular record may be the first time that Iago Sparrows have ever left the Cape Verde Islands. My only precedent for an encounter as long as this was a White-throated Sparrow, *Zonotrichia albicollis* that stayed aboard ship from just south of Newfoundland, Canada, to Kiel, Germany.

As for the Swifts, we didn't see the species again, but later on, off Gomera, we saw a Barn Swallow, a House Martin and 11 Whimbrel, all beating into a very strong headwind. Very satisfying stuff!

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Red-footed Booby: a Canary Islands first

by CPO Steve Copsey

On Sunday 23 September, HMS *Protector* was heading towards the South Atlantic, transiting through the Canary Islands, with Tenerife and Mount Teide in view to starboard. I had just started work when I got piped to ring the bridge. I was duly informed by the bridge team that a Northern Gannet was perched on the foremast. I made my way up to the bridge via my cabin to grab my camera. When I arrived on the bridge, I looked at the foremast to see not a Gannet but an immature plumaged Red-footed Booby.

I immediately thought this would be a decent record as I know that Red-footed Booby is not common in the Western Palearctic. The bird seemed reasonably settled and spent quite a lot of time preening as well as admiring the view from its lofty perch. The conditions were not ideal for photography as it was quite overcast, although that did not stop me from rattling off numerous record shots. I decided to pop back up to the bridge later when the sun was out hoping to get some better images. Unfortunately when I arrived I was informed the bird had flown ten minutes earlier. A day later as we headed further south, what was almost certainly the same individual was seen flying alongside the ship as I worked on the bridge. It perched briefly on the foremast as it had twenty four hours previously, but stayed only a few minutes before disappearing for good.

Later in the week after the sighting had been posted on the Three Amigo's Blog, I received an e-mail from Ricard Gutierrez, a member of the rarities committee for Rare Birds Spain, informing me that this bird was a first record for the Canary Islands. He was seeking permission, which I was more than happy to give, to disseminate information and images of the bird to a wider audience.

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Plate 169. Red-footed Booby, Canary Islands, 23 September 2012. © *S Copsey*

Black Tern *Chlidonias niger* (Linnaeus 1758): a species new to the British Indian Ocean territory

by Peter Carr

Black Tern *Chlidonias niger* breeds in the Old and New World and is a strongly migratory species. The nominate *C. n. niger* (Linnaeus, 1758), Eurasian Black Tern, ranges from southern Scandinavia to southern Spain, east through Europe and western Asia to central Mongolia. Individuals from this area mainly winter on the Atlantic coast of Africa, from the Western Sahara to South Africa. The North American Black Tern, *C. n. surinamensis* (Gmelin, 1789), is found across much of Canada to the northern regions of the USA with individuals wintering on the Pacific coast of Mexico, the Pacific and Atlantic coast of Central America and northern South America (del Hoyo *et al.* 1996 in: BirdLife International, 2013).

This species is gregarious throughout the year and travels over land and sea, often in large flocks on passage and in the winter. In the non-breeding season it is predominately coastal though has been found up to 600km off shore (BirdLife International, 2013). It is categorised as a species of Least Concern (LC) by BirdLife International (2013) despite there having been a small breeding population decrease over the last 40 years in North America (BirdLife International, 2013) and it being rated Amber (European Concern) in the United Kingdom (Robinson, 2005).

Plate 170. Black Terns *Chlidonias niger* in amongst a breeding colony of Sooty Tern *Onychoprion fuscatus* on South Brother, British Indian Ocean Territory. These birds constitute the first confirmed record of this species in BIOT. © Lisa Kedding

In the British Indian Ocean Territory (BIOT) there has been a single claim of this species, a lone bird of unstated age or plumage in the Egmont Islands on 1 February 1975 (Baldwin, 1975). Due to the lack of supporting details or photograph and the very real possibility of it being White-winged Tern *Chlidonias leucopterus* (Temminck, 1815),(a regular northern hemisphere winter visitor to BIOT), this record was treated with caution and placed in the non-verified category of birds that have occurred in the Territory (Carr, 2011).

As part of a routine patrol of the northern atolls of BIOT by British Forces stationed on Diego Garcia, the island of South Brother on the western Great Chagos Bank was visited on 26 July 2010 and inspected for any signs of poaching activities. This patrol was accompanied by Petty Officer Kedding USN, a photographer attached to the Armed Forces Network, a United States military media organisation. PO Kedding was producing a feature on the environmental role undertaken by BF BIOT in the northern atolls and in preparation for this took numerous photographs. A selection of these photographs was passed to HQ BF BIOT and as the then Executive Officer I copied and retained a number of the wildlife shots. It was noted at the time that the photographs contained numerous shots of Sooty Tern *Onychoprion fuscatus* (Linnaeus, 1766) that were breeding on South Brother at the time of the patrol.

Several months later I was preparing a presentation and required a photograph of Sooty Tern. Remembering the Kedding shots, I started viewing them to retrieve an appropriate shot. On scrutiny I noticed that in a series of shots of airborne Sooty Terns were several *Chlidonias* 'marsh' terns, initially thought to be White-winged Tern. To confirm the identity of these birds I sent a small selection to Captain Neil Cheshire who corrected the identification to Black Tern. One of the factors used in the determination of species was tail fork depth. The birds in the photographs have a very shallow fork depth (Black Tern ♂ 11–26mm, ♀ 11–23; White-winged Tern ♂ 5–12mm, ♀ 4–13mm, Olsen & Larsson, 1995). Another factor is the underwing colour. Adult White-winged Tern moult their black underwings very late after breeding (Cramp, 1985; Olsen & Larsson, 1995) and therefore these birds, if White-winged Tern, should have shown vestiges of black underwing coverts. In the Chagos, White-winged Tern have been recorded with vestiges of black underwings as late as March (pers. obs.). It has not been possible (to date) to determine the subspecies of Black Tern photographed on South Brother in July 2010.

These birds constitute the first confirmed record of Black Tern in BIOT and are of considerable interest. Neither *C. n niger* nor *surinamensis* occurs regularly in the Indian Ocean. The former winters primarily in tropical West Africa (Atlantic Ocean) where it is largely coastal, with some USSR birds wintering on the Caspian and Black Seas. The western Nearctic breeding populations winter south through Panama to Peru (Pacific Ocean); eastern Nearctic populations south through Panama to Venezuela and occasionally to the West Indies (Atlantic Ocean) (Cramp, 1985). Neither should occur in the central Indian Ocean.

Vagrancy has been recorded in both subspecies, though Black Tern have not been recorded from the nearest land to BIOT, the Maldives, (www.bubo.org/Checklist/maldives-obc.html accessed 25 June 2013) and the Seychelles (www.seychellesbirdrecordscommittee.com accessed 25 June 2013). Individuals recorded in Australia are "probably of the American subspecies *C. n. surinamensis*" (Higgins & Davies, 1996 in DSEWPC, 2013). The date of occurrence is also of interest being so soon after northern hemisphere breeding. Autumn migration in the west Palearctic begins in the last third of June with immature non-breeders moving first. North American populations are recoded on passage from July onwards (Cramp, 1985). Late July appears a very early date for adult birds to be in the central Indian Ocean. Finally, it is possible that this record is the first time Black Tern has been recorded associated with breeding colonies of Sooty Tern.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Petty Officer Lisa Kedding USN for the photograph and Captain Neil Cheshire for determining the birds as Black Tern.

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Introduction to the revised RNBWS Checklist of Seabirds

by W.R.P. Bourne and N.G.Cheshire

In the absence of any generally accepted list of seabirds, the Royal Naval Birdwatching Society published a checklist of preferred names in its report *Sea Swallow* (42:16–27) in 1993, and a revised edition was inserted in *Sea Swallow* 45 in 1996. Priority was given at that time to scientific names because they were thought to be more stable, but following the widespread introduction of 'splitting' taxonomy, and the development of a world list of bird names by the International Ornithological Committee (IOC : www.worldbirdnames.org) it seems wiser to give priority to English names, and we have now revised the RNBWS list to bring it up to date. We have listed forms separable at sea and give our preferred vernacular name first, the IOC name in square brackets if it differs, any common alternatives, abbreviations for use in lists, the scientific name used by the IOC, and summarised range. Doubtful forms are placed in brackets and where there is a possibility of confusion of related forms the code name can be reduced to a joint term as among the albatrosses. Where the IOC have accepted proposed splits former scientific names are completed in brackets so that the relation to past classification is clear and these forms can be regarded as subspecies or members of superspecies according to taste. General comments appear at the heads of sections. It should be noted that while there is often resistance in Britain to American vernacular names, these are often senior English names. We are omitting coastal species such as divers or loons, grebes, wildfowl and raptors as they are not normally seen out at sea.

The full Checklist is available as a PDF file on the RNBWS website.

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Book Review

Camphuysen, Kees (C.J.) 2013. A historical ecology of two closely related gull species (Laridae): multiple adaptations to a man-made environment. Ph D thesis., University of Groningen. Paperback, Pp. 406, ISBN/EAN 978-90-9027538-3. Obtainable Kees.camphuysen@nioz.nl.

This is an extremely detailed and important comparative study of Herring (HG) and Lesser Black-backed (LBB) Gulls in the Netherlands. In the nineteenth century they only had two breeding gulls, but following protection they now have ten. The present ones were persecuted between the wars, but are now protected again; HGs reached a peak about 1980, LBBs more recently, with a decline due to improved hygiene and reduced fishery discards. The male LBBs are more marine, travelling further, and resting on the sea, while the HGs feed on bivalves along the shore, supplementing them at sea when they have chicks. Both may feed inland, where they may take small mammals. The HGs have better breeding success but poorer winter survival; the LBBs poorer breeding success, with cannibalism of the young due to food shortages, but better winter survival due to migration, juveniles going further, when they may be replaced by northern HGs at sea. There are three main groups of HGs, in the eastern Waddensee, to the west around Texel, and in the Delta. This agrees pretty well with British experience, where HGs are primarily coastal and LBBs disperse more widely both at sea and inland, though both have become scavengers and LBBs less migratory.

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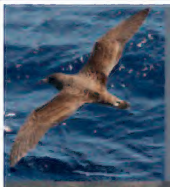

Cory's Shearwater

Audouin's Gull

White-tailed Tropicbird

White Tern

Great Frigatebird

Northern Gannet

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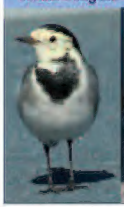
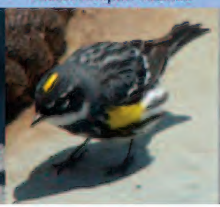
White Wagtail



Melodious Warbler

Yellow-rumped Warbler



Black Redstart

Scop's Owl

Plate 171. White-eyed Gull with Sooty Gulls, Djibouti, January 2013. © *C. Patrick*